



SPRING

No. 991

THE  
CORNHILL

*Oliver Warner*

*Lesley Blanch*

*Peter Sutcliffe*

*Laurens van der Post*



With Illustrations  
Two shillings and sixpence



1952

JOHN MURRAY

# THE QUARTERLY REVIEW

Established in 1809, when the power of Napoleon was at its height, the QUARTERLY has seen the map of Europe changed and changed again, and has witnessed extraordinary progress in all departments of social, national, and international life.

It has been the purpose of this Review, through the minds and pens of writers with authority, to appreciate the values of that progress. The names of its contributors may be taken as an index to the history of the times in Literature, Science and Art, to Politics and Social endeavour through their infinite channels, as well as to very much else.

*The April issue contains :*

THE CHALLENGE TO CONSERVATISM.

By Sir Harold Webbe, C.B.E., M.P.

EUROPEAN FEDERATION—THE NEED FOR REALISM.

By Professor A. L. Goodhart, K.B.E., Q.C.

THE LAST PHASE OF THE INDIAN STATES : II.

By Sir Arthur Lothian, K.C.I.E., C.S.I.

A WOOL TOWN IN THE COITSWOLDS.

By Kenneth Hare.

LORD PERTH.

By Captain A. L. Kennedy, M.C.

RACIAL STRESSES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

By Michael Vane.

THE POETRY OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

By Alfred Noyes, C.B.E., D.Litt.

PROFITS AND TAXATION.

By Paul Derrick.

MURDER AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT.

By J. C. Arnold.

KEATS AND THE LIMITATIONS OF PANTHEISM.

By the Rev. Canon Roger Lloyd.

THE ANGLO-EGYPTIAN SUDAN.

By Lt.-Col. F. C. Balfour, C.I.E., C.B.E., M.C.

SOME RECENT BOOKS.

Published in JANUARY,  
APRIL, JULY & OCTOBER

8s. 6d. net

JOHN MURRAY

# THE CORNHILL



No. 991

SPRING, 1952

## MAGAZINE

---

	PAGE
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES .. .. .	3
ISABELLE EBERHARDT (Illustrated) .. <i>by Lesley Blanch</i>	5
HEAVEN AND EARTH .. .. <i>by Peter Sutcliffe</i>	38
A BAR OF SHADOW (A Story) <i>by Laurens van der Post</i>	42
A NOTE ON MARRYAT (Illustrated) .. <i>by Oliver Warner</i>	68

---

JOHN MURRAY, 50 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.1

*The Editor asks that all contributions should be addressed to him at 50 Albemarle Street, London, W.1, and accompanied by a stamped envelope.*

*Subscriptions for the CORNHILL are available from any bookseller or from 50 Albemarle Street, London, W.1. A subscription for 4 issues costs 10s. 8d. and for 8 issues 21s. 4d., including postage. At present the CORNHILL appears quarterly and will be publishing occasional supplements.*



# HEFFER'S



**A CAMBRIDGE  
BOOKSHOP  
THAT IS  
KNOWN  
IN ALL PARTS  
OF THE WORLD**

**W. HEFFER & SONS LTD.**

Petty Cury, Cambridge

## FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHS

High-grade photographic prints of models of all ages.

We offer these valuable prints to artists and students as an aid to their work in figure construction, composition and design.

Send stamp for particulars of the very useful range of Model Poses now available. Kindly state profession or age when writing.



**C. LEON PUBLISHING CO.**

792 Harrow Road, London, N.W.10

## FABER BOOKS

**Flaubert** PHILIP SPENCER

'A very good book.'—Cyril Connolly: *Sunday Times*. 'May be read with pleasure and will hold its scholarly place.'—Charles Morgan: *Spectator*. 25s.

*new fiction*

**Shameful Harvest**

A. G. STREET

His first long novel for 6 years, and his best. 12s. 6d.

**I Saw No Sun**

J. DELVES-BROUGHTON

Compton Mackenzie says, 'It is a long time since I read so imaginative, so accurate, so vivid and so passionate an historical romance—Robert Louis Stevenson would have welcomed *I Saw No Sun*.'—*Bookman*. Set in Scotland in the 1730's. Book Society Recommendation. 15s.

**Willa, You're Wanted**

AFFLECK GRAVES

'The greatest pleasure a reviewer can have is to find a first novel like *Willa, You're Wanted*. . . . If any parent of young children is contemplating divorce, let him or her read this book and think again.'—John Betjeman: *Daily Telegraph*. 12s. 6d.

**Winding Ways**

WINIFRED PECK

This story contrasts old and new educational methods.

'Its sensitivity, perception and wit should delight many readers.'—*Scotsman*. 12s. 6d.

**All Souls** RUTH TOMALIN

'I hope that *All Souls* will be read in 20 years' time along with Mr. Weston's *Good Wine*.'—*John O' London's*. 12s. 6d.

## FABER BOOKS

For April Publication

**BYRON, SHELLEY**  
and their  
**PISAN CIRCLE**

**Professor C. L. Cline**

After a century and a quarter of Byron-Shelley scholarship it might seem unlikely that there are any biographical gaps left, but the months spent by Byron and Shelley together in Italy are of great importance in the history of both. Professor Cline has managed to discover a considerable amount of new material which he has used in the spirit of meticulous scholarship, and his work is of real value to the expert, as well as being enjoyably readable for a larger less specialised public.

*Illustrated.* 25s. net.

**CHARLES NAPIER**

*Friend and Fighter, 1782-1853*

**Rosamond Lawrence**

Charles Napier, son of Lady Sarah Lennox, was a great character. He served under Wellington, worked with Byron in Greece, and in India became known as the Conqueror of Scinde.

*Illustrated.* 21s. net.

*March 26th.*

Fiction

**ADELIZA**

**Catherine Gayton**

Catherine Gayton's earlier novels were much appreciated for their colourful and wittily detailed pictures of life in the early nineteenth century. In this new story we are taken into the fascinating period of the 1830's. Dorset, Kent, London and Paris form the background to a story which develops swiftly into drama.

9s. 6d. net.

**JOHN MURRAY**

2nd Printing in hand

## OMAR KHAYYAM

*A New Version  
based upon Recent  
Discoveries*

**Professor  
A. J. Arberry, Litt.D.**

'Professor Arberry has packed into a preface of only 45 pages an exciting story of literary detection and a comparison of Omar and FitzGerald.'

—*Manchester Guardian.*

'Professor Arberry has chosen for his rendering the metre of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. This was a daring and successful choice. He handles those slow sequences with skill and gaiety; his metre rings out as a carillon rather than as a dirge. I fear that those who read Professor Arberry's fine translation will regret the lilt of FitzGerald's paraphrase. But it is helpful to dispel illusions.'—Harold Nicolson in *The Spectator*.

15s. net

**JOHN MURRAY**

## "South African Sherry for me every time

So I've converted you, too, then?

You certainly have! Do you remember you told me to look specially for the fine South African sherries. Since then I've found some which are just exactly to my taste.

And don't you find them easy on the pocket, too? That means something these days!

Yes, how is it they can send us such remarkably good wines at such a reasonable price?

Well, there are two reasons: that amazing climate of theirs at the Cape, and then the Preferential Duty.

No wonder South African Sherry is becoming so popular, then.

It deserves to be. Do you know they've been making wine in South Africa for nearly 300 years. With all that experience behind them and the splendid organization they have now built up, they're able to produce the very highest quality. Their really fine wines are matured for many years before they're shipped to this country.

I suppose we can now say, then, that South Africa is one of the leading wine producing countries?

Well, wouldn't you say it was, from the taste of this sherry? Let me fill your glass!"



**SOUTH AFRICAN WINE  
FARMERS ASSOCIATION**

(LONDON) LIMITED

Constable

---

3

REMARKABLE WOMEN

---

**Jane Welsh  
Carlyle**

V. S. PRITCHETT (*New Statesman*):  
"An important book, fair, delightful and perceptive. This Life is based on her huge correspondence—and her husband's too—and many of the letters were unknown or unused. One could not ask for a more self-effacing, just and considerate biography."

**NECESSARY EVIL**

by The Hansons

*Illustrated*

4js.

**Katherine  
Mansfield**

HOWARD SPRING (*Country Life*):  
"A tragic, beautiful book. The urgent sense of life's brevity makes the writer's artist-eye sharp and clear to the beauty that must soon be relinquished; and the letters are full of vignettes of scenes and feelings that have a wonderful authenticity."

**K.M.'s LETTERS**

to John Middleton Murry

*Illustrated*

4js.

**Florence Nightingale**

LADY VIOLET BONHAM-CARTER (*News Chronicle*):

"A masterly biography which reveals a woman greater even than the legend she inspired.

"This book will take its place among the classic biographies of English literature. One of the greatest figures in our history is here brought back from fame to life."

**FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE**

by Cecil Woodham-Smith

5th printing. *Illustrated.* 21s.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

---

LESLEY BLANCH : journalist and wife of Romain Gary, French writer and diplomat, lives at Berne, is an enthusiastic traveller. It is curious that, when so little has been written in English on Isabelle Eberhardt, both Lesley Blanch and Cicely Mackworth were simultaneously tracing the astonishing Eberhardt legend.

PETER SUTCLIFFE is twenty-four and spent a year at Cambridge before joining the Army, learned Chinese and went to Japan as a sergeant. Before returning to Cambridge he worked on a farm in France and as a waiter in a Butlin's Holiday Camp. His first book, *The Blindness of Richard Blake*, was published by the Cresset Press.

LAURENS VAN DER POST : born in Africa, writer and farmer, served in the Commandos and special forces, behind enemy lines in Abyssinia with Wingate, in the Western Desert and the Far East, captured by the Japanese in Java. Later served on Lord Mountbatten's staff, subsequently undertook several official missions exploring little known parts of Africa. His book, *Venture into the Interior*, was published by Hogarth Press. He is married to Ingaret Giffard, who is also a writer.

OLIVER WARNER was Reader to Chatto and Windus until the war, at the Admiralty from 1941 to 1947, specialises in naval history, sea painting and sea writers; author of *Captains and Kings* (Allen and Unwin), *British Marine Painting* (Batsford) and *Joseph Conrad* (Longman's).

# THE HISTORY OF THE

First part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

Second part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

Third part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

Fourth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

Fifth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

Sixth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

Seventh part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

Eighth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

Ninth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

Tenth part of the history of the world, from the beginning of the world to the present time, as far as the history of the world is concerned.

# Isabelle Eberhardt

## Portrait of a Legend

BY LESLEY BLANCH

---

EVERYTHING about her was extraordinary. She was a woman, dressed as a man. A European turned Arab. A Russian who transposed 'nitchevo' into 'mektoub,' whose untidy mystical torments, *l'âme slave*, found peace in Islam's faith—and flesh. She was born on the prim, pale lake-side of Geneva. She died in the burning desert. She was an expatriate wanderer whose nomadic Slav background led her to range the desert insatiably: yet she dreamed of a *petite-bourgeoise* haven, a grocer's-shop in some obscure little Algerian town where she and her Arab husband and all his hordes of relatives could conduct a modest business. She adored her insignificant husband, but her sensual adventures were without number. Her behaviour was outrageous; she drank, she smoked hashish, but *déclassée*, she remained *racée*. She was the outcast, despised and rejected by French Administration and the colony in general. But she was General Lyautey's trusted friend. She was a writer who was almost unrecognised, and quite penniless till after her death, when, ironically, posthumous editions of her books earned a small fortune—for others. Her death was strangest of all, for she was drowned in the desert.

In her brief lifetime she aroused violent interest. She was loathed or loved, respected or despised. No one was indifferent to her. Her echoes have never died. No one who knew her ever forgot her. Those who had never known her felt the strange, compelling force of her character. She was a legend during her lifetime. Since her death the legend grew monstrous and distorted. *La Bonne Nomade*, *L'Amazone du Sable*, *L'Androgyne du Desert*, or *Le Cosaque du Desert* . . . these were romantic, but reasonable epithets. But she was also vulgarised as *l'Esclave Errante* in a cheap farrago of nonsense played at the Théâtre de Paris in 1924. In 1939 she was *Isabella d'Afrique*, in another



lamentable piece which would have revolted her fastidious nature. For fastidious she was, and naïve and dignified, and pious too. All these, in spite of excesses and brutalities of living which would have made a *Légionnaire* recoil.

Her writings have not been translated, and even in the original most of them suffered a posthumous process of 'editing' which amounts to re-writing by the late Victor Barracaund, who took it on himself to distort her by mazes of over-writing. Since little of Isabelle Eberhardt the writer is known to the English reader, it may be better, here, to speak more of her life than her work, and the woman, or man, Si Mahmoud, as she was known, than the writer. There are few people, now, who knew her. She died in 1904, at the age of twenty-seven. But when, a few months ago, I talked of her to General Catroux, he told me that although he had never known her himself, being in Indo-China while she was with the French troops in the Sud-Oranais, she was a legendary figure in Southern Algeria, when he arrived there later. It was the General's elder brother, then a young officer serving under Lyautey, who had known her well.

She was one of the very rare women whom Lyautey had liked : she had, in fact, charmed him by her bizarre character, her knowledge of the desert, and her profound understanding of the Arab people. Lyautey was at once poetic and practical : with her, he 'talked Sahara,' as General Catroux put it, for hours on end. Her close contacts with the powerful Arab religious leaders were often used by the French. Her experiences, and the unexpected range of her conversation, delighted Lyautey as much as her knowledge impressed him. "No one knows Africa as she does," he said. General Catroux's handsome, haggard face softened, lightened to enthusiasm as he told me of the pilgrimages he had made to her grave in the Moslem cemetery of Ain-Sefra. He had talked with many of the Arabs, the venerated marabouts, or priests, the Spahis, and the nomads. To all of them she had remained a legend.

\* \* \*

Isabelle Eberhardt's background was Russian, the mixture of races which Russian-Jewish stock implies, which may account for the force of her nomadic cravings, just as her youth in the insipid Geneva countryside may account for her appreciation of the oriental landscape. But although her background was Russian, it was not Russia : it was that changeless emotional, intellectual and

fatalistic life of all Slav exiles, gathered round the samovar, the air blurred with cigarette smoke, husky centrifugal Slav voices discussing Nietzsche or Bakunin, universal brotherhood, anarchism, chemistry, music . . . disordered, timeless discussions, till the stove grew cold and shawls were huddled round shabby shoulders and someone coughed, and someone snored, and someone played the violin, and the grey morning seeped through the shutters. Often, such discussions left no time to eat, but there was always tea, the inevitable glasses of tea. This was the exiles' climate. They lived in it everywhere, in Paris, or Rome, or London. The pattern is familiar to anyone who has known them.

Isabelle Eberhardt spent her first eighteen years in this setting, in the smug suburban ambience of Meyrin, outside Geneva. Her mother, Madame Nathalie de Moërder, *née* Korff-Eberhardt, was the wife of a Russian general. She was beautiful, gentle, and pampered. Outwardly, she had seemed a conventional wealthy St. Petersburg matron; but was she? Little is known of her life in Russia. Abruptly, around 1870, she left the country for ever, with her three children, and settled in Switzerland. Nothing unusual here. There were Russian expatriates everywhere. Turgenev becalmed in Paris, beside Pauline Viardot. Herzen raging in Turin. Bakunin in London, and the palmy Riviera promenades thick with noble Slav families basking in the warmth and liberty of France.

But the presence of Alexander Trophimowsky, her children's tutor, immediately changes our estimate of her character. We observe her more closely, and we find she is not so true to pattern. She was the illegitimate daughter of a Fräulein Eberhardt and a rich Russian Jew named Korff, which in itself must have been a scandalous secret to be hidden from the rigid society of St. Petersburg. Moreover, she had run off with the tutor, though here, she is perhaps more in the convention of misunderstood wives. With a singular sense of timing the General died a year or so later, leaving her all his money, which is far less in the convention of deserted husbands.

Alexander Trophimowsky was Armenian, splendidly handsome, an ex-priest, or pope, of the Orthodox faith, born in Khison in 1826. He was an intellectual, atheist and utopist; tall and bearded, the disciple of Tolstoy and the friend of Bakunin. Whether he left Russia expressly to join Mme de Moërder or also for more abstract reasons of faith or politics is not known. At

any rate, he abandoned a wife and children, and he and Mme de Moërder settled down together in the Villa Tropicale, renamed the Villa Neuve. With them were the de Moërder children, Nicholas, Nathalie, Vladimir, and Augustin, born in 1872, in Switzerland, but recognised by the still devoted General who had followed his wife to attempt a reconciliation. However, Madame de Moërder preferred the tutor. Five years later, on February 17th, 1877, a natural daughter was born. She was registered as Isabelle-Wilhelmina Marie Eberhardt.

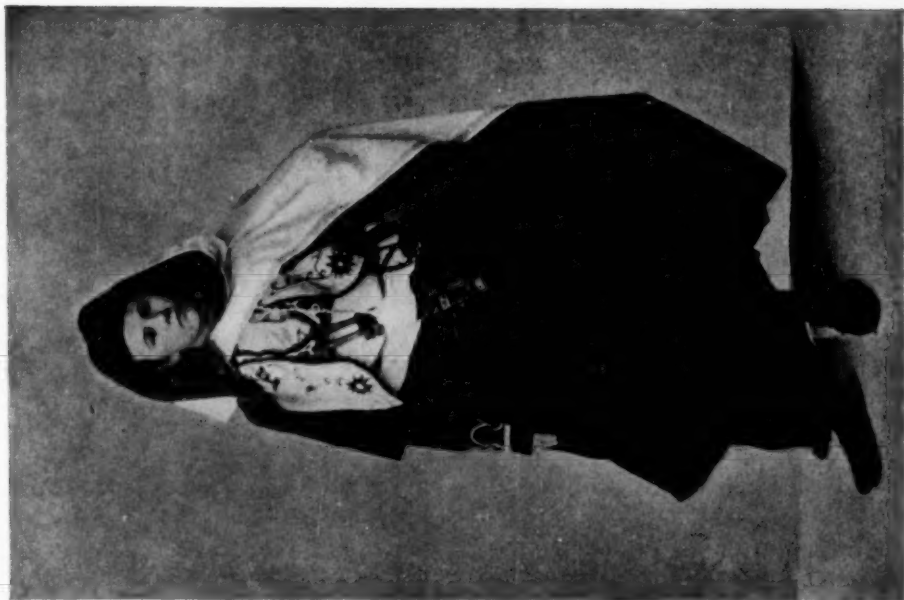
It was not a really harmonious atmosphere. The tangled green maze of sub-tropical vegetation, for which the Villa had been named, occupied Trophimowsky, who cultivated his plants in a scientific rather than a horticultural spirit. He also cultivated the children's education, which was wide and tangled too. He forbade them any schooling except that which was filtered through his own violently personal prejudices. Isabelle learned six languages, including Greek and Latin and Arabic. Philosophy, metaphysics, and chemistry were thrown in as make-weights.

The elder de Moërder children deeply resented the presence of 'Vava,' their mother's lover. There were feuds and jealousies, and none of them seems to have appreciated the ironic ex-pope's many admirable qualities. Though perhaps, domestically, such an iconoclast was difficult.

"Jésus-Christ canaille!" was one of his favourite remarks. He was thought to be connected with some of the Nihilist Societies which skulked in Switzerland. At any rate he was vilified by his neighbours, who pitied and dramatised the lot of the de Moërder children in his grip. A Swiss governess who had known them as well, perhaps, as any outsider ever could, left a series of rather censorious recollections, which call to mind another governess, Malwida von Meysenburg, in another equally chaotic Slav household, that of Alexander Herzen. (Though Fräulein von Meysenburg, with Germanic thoroughness, did not stop at criticism, and succeeded in wresting Herzen's younger daughter from him for ever.) It needed no outside influences, however, to turn the de Moërder children against Trophimowsky. Nathalie was openly at war. Suddenly, she escaped by marrying into a very humble Swiss family, tradespeople whose son was a lawyer's clerk. This rocked the Villa Neuve to its foundations. Trophimowsky raged. Her mother wept. They could have forgiven almost anything but a flight into small-fry respectability. She was cut off. Her name



THE GIRL, AGED SEVENTEEN



THE POSE, AGED TWENTY



THE LEGEND, AGED TWENTY-SEVEN

was never mentioned again. Her departure had a profound effect on the little Isabelle. She had stood for some stability and the more accepted hygienes. Now dirt and disorder reigned. No sheets, no tablecloths, no more regular meals. . . . When, years later, Isabelle Eberhardt made occasional references to the affair, she always said her sister had returned to Russia and married an officer of the Imperial Guard. Even *La Bonne Nomade* had her snob weaknesses.

One by one, one way or another, the de Moerder children escaped from Trophimowsky's influence. After Nathalie, Nicholas, who returned to Russia. He seems to have been a reactionary type and may have had something to do with Tzarist agents said to have driven Vladimir to his death. Vladimir, 'le cactophile,' bristled with complexes. It is probable he was connected with the underground Revolutionary and drug-peddling organisations to which Augustin had belonged. At any rate, he killed himself in 1898. Later, Augustin, too, killed himself, and later still, Augustin's daughter. They were a doomed family. It was Augustin, the youngest, who most nearly approached Isabelle in years and was her childhood companion. They loved each other with a morbid tenderness, and as they grew up they began to romanticise their affections. On Isabelle's side it was perhaps the love of her life. Some of her later letters show how her childish emotions grew into an adult, or perhaps adolescent passion which may or may not have been returned. When, in his twenties, Augustin was married, miserably, to a commonplace girl, 'Jenny l'ouvrière' as Isabelle dismisses her, she made no secret of her resentment. Augustin, committing suicide in 1914 was perhaps not only ending the failures and miseries of his life in a culminating *cafard*, but also stilling the longings for his dead sister. These are problems no one will ever know, but the emotional overtones they conjure were the dominant influence of Isabelle Eberhardt's unstable nature. In a curious letter of nostalgia, written on Christmas Eve, 1895, when Augustin had left the alternate stagnations and uproars of the Villa Neuve to fling himself into the Foreign Legion at Sidi Bel Abbes (a typical gesture of his period), Isabelle writes of her longings: 'of the kisses we gave each other at 10 o/c that night of Saturday Oct. 12 . . .' She quotes Loti, for of course she is steeped in *Aziyadé*; its beautiful pseudo-oriental melancholy has already reached her inner ear. She has already begun to read and write Arabic easily, but she is enmeshed in the more superficial, sensuous



mysticisms of Islam. She luxuriates in her abandon of grief. 'Separated, separated, my beloved, perhaps for all eternity. No hope, no faith; absolute solitude . . . No one will ever know the depths of our suffering. . . .' She is in a bad way: she continues in Arabic characters, quotes some Greek, and recalls again their love. She speaks of a Turk with whom she has been in love, but he is dismissed. 'Toi, toi,' she writes passionately, 'ô! avec toi, toujours—toujours avec toi, de près ou de loin, toujours.'

If these spontaneous affections for her half-brother—or possibly her full brother—were damned up, or diverted by convention, this is, I believe, an explanation of much in her subsequent melancholy, her neurotic cravings for stronger meat, deeper draughts. I do not mean to imply that had she been able to marry Augustin she would have settled into a contented matron. That could never be, with Augustin, or anyone else: but something occurred between them, I believe, which affected her emotional balance profoundly, and which accounts for those restless cravings for oblivion, which were more powerful than her Slav heritage alone.

But all that belongs to the tragic nomad of later, of the desert. Now she is still at Meyrin. She is surrounded by all the *va et vient* of exiles, and friends of many races. Gradually, Moslems predominate. The Villa vibrates with Pan-Islamic fervours. About this time she and her mother were toying with the idea of becoming converted to the Moslem faith. Certainly the atheist Trophimowsky would have raised no objections. And anyhow, was there so great a change? A comforting fatalism prevailed in both religions, both races.

Isabelle Eberhardt's later-day habit of wearing only men's clothes, of dressing as an Arab cavalier, and calling herself Si Mahmoud was often criticised as being a pose, a love of attracting attention. But it had its beginnings in her childhood, and was fostered by Trophimowsky, who encouraged all non-conformism on principle. Later, as General Catroux observed, it was practical. Her nomadic life, her comings and goings, passed less observed, and by then she was very poor, too. She had no wardrobe. Not for her the background of another ardent, though less highly-coloured Arab authority, Gertrude Bell. Not for her the resources, the worldly trappings such as those which Miss Bell commanded, when she wrote home asking for *crêpe de Chine* blouses, purple chiffon evening dresses, or parasols.

Alas! Si Mahmoud's coquetties were limited to a rather fine



pair of red boots. Her hands, long pale aristocratic hands, were often remarked : they were as handsome as her face was plain.

But to return to Geneva in the eighteen-nineties. Perhaps since she was growing into a plain girl she felt herself more suited to men's clothes, and her life-long love of travesty, of dressing-up, was in part a defence, or calculated effect, as well as an inherent craving to escape from herself—her sex. Even in her own mind she does not seem decided as to which sex she is—or wishes to be. This indecision or ambiguity is emphasised in her journal, where, for the first part, she always refers to herself in the masculine gender, and only later adopts the feminine. By to-day's standards I do not think she would have been thought plain : indeed she might be found fascinating : but she had nothing of the rosy-posy prettiness of her epoch. She was tall and slim, with high Kalmuck cheek-bones and black eyes, set Chinese-slanted, in a sallow face. Her build, and her dragging gait, so different to the admired young ladies' tripping steps, made it easy for her to pass as a boy. She loved the adventure of it all, and was photographed as a French sailor, her hair cropped. She fancied herself in Syrian costume, and in Arab robes, a synthetic, photographer's outfit, dagger and all. She was moving unmistakably, even in this superficial sartorial way, towards Islam.

It is curious to reflect that she, who was to know the desert and the Arabs as perhaps no other European woman has done, living among them, with them, without reserve, in dirt and disease and dust (no haughty Lady Hester Stanhope approach, here), where long spells of debauch alternated with meditative withdrawal, was to leave us a fancy-dress image, the photograph of a round-faced girl, posed in a fake Bedouin dress ; a soaped, brushed Isabelle, who would reluctantly remove the burnous, lay aside the dagger, and take the horse-omnibus home to tea.

About this time she began a correspondence with a young officer stationed in the Sahara, who, bored, advertised for a pen-friend, and found himself launched into a flood-tide of political and metaphysical outpourings, bewildering, though rewarding and far removed from his original cosy notions. Eugène Letord remained her friend for life. Whether they were ever more to each other is not known.

\* \* \*

Writing of Eugène Letord, I remember a strange meeting I had,

the night before I left Tunis, when I was told of an old French woman, once a friend of Isabelle Eberhardt's, now living in an almshouse outside the city. Someone who had known her well, who could recapture, perhaps, the essence of this enigmatic figure. I rushed off, bumping over the mud-tracks and refuse heaps of the waste lands behind the Arab town. I went from almshouses to asylums and hospitals. I could not find her. . . . But she was run to earth at last, an hour or so before my plane took off. She was a wild, wrecked, yet romantic figure, still with traces of great beauty. She, too, had turned Moslem. Her skeletal blue-veined hands were tattooed with the symbols of Islam. She had lost her sight but not her memory.

It was evident she had known Si Mahmoud well. There was no condemnation in her attitude. "She was an alcoholic," she said, briefly. "That was the only thing out of key with her profound religious acceptance of Moslem faith. Yes, she was deeply religious—the stuff of mystics and martyrs. . . . She lived like a man—or a boy, because she was far more like one, physically. She had a hermaphrodite quality—she was passionate, sensual, but not in a woman's way. And she was completely flat-chested," she added. "I know—we often used to bathe together in the mountain streams. She had her vanities, but they were more those of an Arab dandy. Her beautiful hands were tinted with henna, her burnous was always immaculate, and she was, when she could afford it, drenched in the overpowering perfumes all Arabs love. . . .

"At one time she used to spend whole days in the *souks*; when she saw a man she wanted, she took him. She'd beckon him over and off they'd go. She never made any pretences; she never hid her adventures. Why should she? They were only one side of her character. She had her deep religious ecstasies, I believe, and those she did hide. She was very strict in her observance of ritual. Five prayers a day, in the mosque, the street, or the desert. Wherever she was, she prayed. And whatever she did, she remained well-bred. That sounds absurd, perhaps, but it's true. . . . She was very poor. There was a man called Eugène . . . I don't know who he was. She often spoke of him. She used to say Eugène sent her money when things were desperate. . . . Eugène or Allah! It is all God's will. . . ." She shut her eyes. "Why do you want to know all this? I'm tired. Go and read lies about her in the Bibliothèque," she said sharply, and I could get nothing more from her.

LESLEY BLANCH

"She's very weak, she'll sleep now," said the nurse, and I left, reflecting that probably such a lonely end would have been Isabelle Eberhardt's, had she not been drowned. Neither Eugène nor anyone else could have saved her from old age.

\* \* \*

If a life could be said to be pre-destined, Isabelle Eberhardt's was such a one. All the threads drew her to Islam. There were more and more oriental ties. Soon, Mme de Moërdet and her daughter were persuaded it would be agreeable to move to North Africa. Augustin had left the Foreign Legion and was roaming about Algeria looking vaguely for work. They had many Arab friends. There was Eugène, eager to welcome them. All the more reason for the move. Mother and daughter arrived at Bône in May 1897, and Isabelle's fluent Arabic was the wonder of all her new friends. She had the astonishing facility of her race. When, later, she was asked how she had begun, she replied it had been no trouble at all—she was too lazy to take trouble, "To speak Arabic—well, I just began to speak."

The de Moërdets were completely happy. It was a new life opening before them. Isabelle began to write stories, notes, her remarkable journal, and the first draft of her novel *Le Trimardeur*; a local paper published her charming little story *Yasmina*. There were expeditions into the *bled*, the burning countryside, and Isabelle began to sniff the faraway desert. Now she, and perhaps her mother, were converted to Moslem faith. They knew no Europeans, and the better to become absorbed into their new life, they lived in the Arab town: on the fringes, rather, and there is something symbolic, here. They still had one foot in the West, a window which looked down towards the broad streets of the French town. The future seemed full of exotic promise. The damp lake-side vistas of Geneva evaporated under the blazing African sun.

Soon this happy life at Bône was ended forever. Mme de Moërdet died of a heart attack. Her daughter was distracted. Trophimowsky, arriving late for the funeral, found her raging that she must die with her mother. He coldly offered her his revolver. When she talked of suicide, he showed her the stone-flagged terrace far below their windows. But his ironic detachment gave way before the loss of his mistress and he returned to Geneva broken. Isabella erected a marble *stèle* over her mother's grave in the

Moslem cemetery, in the name of Fatma Manoubia, and was often to return there, luxuriating in her loss of 'The White Spirit' as she called her dead mother, always writing this name in Russian. All her life she was to savour morbid griefs. Her preoccupation with death, her mother's, her own, with the mystery of death, was of neurotic intensity.

Now began a period of wanderings, the foretaste of her real nomadic life. Dressed as an Arab she bought a horse and left Bône at a gallop heading for the Sahara. This brief fling crystallised forever her cravings for the nomad life, above all, for the desert. She had found her country, her people, her *tempo* of living. But her journeys cost money: she had not yet learned to live like the Arabs, on a handful of grain, sleeping anywhere, anyhow. She came to the end of her money, and had to return to Geneva. There, in the shadow-haunted Villa Neuve, she was followed by Rehid Bey, a Turkish suitor she had known some years before. He was now aflame for the eccentric creature. He proposed, and was accepted. He was a diplomat at The Hague, and expected to be nominated to an oriental post. Isabelle was enraptured. Love and the mysterious East went hand in hand.

But suddenly all was changed. The diplomat was nominated to Stockholm. The oriental mirage faded. . . . Isabelle recoiled from the bleak prospect of northern lights and protocol. The engagement was broken off. Augustin, who had returned to the Villa to rot, spent his days with her beside the failing Trophimowsky, haunted, all of them, by memories. The green depths of the garden offered no repose. There were ghosts at every turn. Nathalie vanished, Vladimir, the suicide, in his grave, Mme de Moërder among the *stèles* of Bône, Trophimowsky dying. It was a tomb. On the night of May 14th, 1899, Trophimowsky called for chloral, he had cancer of the throat, and was in great pain. Isabelle and Augustin who had both made fitful studies in medicine prepared the draught. It was fatal. No one will ever know whether this was accidental or deliberate, their typical family inefficiency or a bold decision, but in the morning the lonely, strange old man was dead. The brother and sister buried him beside Vladimir, and with him all their youth. They went their separate ways.

Augustin, in the Midi, soon married 'Jenny l'ouvrière.' From Paris, Isabelle joined them in Caligari. But all was changed. It was a trio, now. The two women faced each other antagon-

istically. Augustin stood between. Isabelle decided to return to North Africa for good. She would like to live at El-Oued, the thousand-domed little town which was to have such a profound significance for her. Why El-Oued? There was the whole Sahara from which to choose. But she was probably fulfilling that destiny in which, as a good Moslem, she believed so blindly.

'If only we could foretell, at each hour, the vital importance of certain actions, even words, which appear of no consequence at the time. . . . There are *no* moments of our life that are without consequence or significance for the future. . . . Mek-toub! it is written. . . .' She was Islam's ready pupil.

Before shaking the dust of Europe from her feet, however, she must return to Paris: there were practical questions to be settled. Perhaps she could find some work, some geographic reportage to do in Africa. Her friend Madame Lydia Paschkoff, the Russian explorer and traveller, could be invaluable to her. This fascinating woman is only glimpsed, in her relation to Si Mahmoud. She flits through the journals like an exotic bird. She made voyages of discovery in the regions of the Upper Nile, was correspondent for *le Figaro* in St. Petersburg, lectured to the Geographic Society, and wrote several long-forgotten novels and travel sketches. She was at once eccentric and worldly, an ardent feminist and warm-hearted. She gave Isabelle Eberhardt much excellent advice which, it is not necessary to remark, was ignored. "To live the life you and I prefer one needs 50,000 francs income." She also gave her many useful introductions. 'Tout Paris' came to her *salon*, and she calculated astutely just how far Si Mahmoud's exotic appearance and adventurous aura could be exploited to the nomad's material advantage. Her advice was sound. Isabelle must always appear in Arab costume, as Si Mahmoud. It would 'épater' the so-useful bourgeoisie. She must not offend the Jews, who were powerful. She must get in touch with such explorers as the Prince of Monaco, or Prince Henri d'Orléans. She must beware of French appetites, which often demanded payment in kind for good offices rendered to lonely young ladies, especially those of an unconventional nature. She presented her to a world of interesting people, but Isabelle was too *gauche*, perhaps too direct to play their game. There was a meeting with the Marquise de Morés, widow of the explorer who had been assassinated, mysteriously, in 1896, on the confines of Tripoli and Tunisia. The widow is said to have commissioned Si Mahmoud to return to the south and try to find



traces of the Marquis, or his assassins. This would have been after Si Mahmoud's heart. Perhaps the deal was concluded. Perhaps the Marquise provided the funds. In any case, it was a pretext for Si Mahmoud's departure, although nothing more was ever heard of the project, or the funds, her detractors said.

Isabelle left Paris abruptly, having failed to make much impression on 'tout Paris,' a circle which is usually particularly receptive to highly-coloured personalities. It is a sad reflection that this odd girl, with all her character, her aristocratic background, her wide culture and originality, did not find sooner that *milieu*, which truly appreciated her, of a certain French *élite*, men of real style and brilliance such as Lyautey and his officers, Catroux and Berriau, whom she only came to know, and by whom she was so justly valued, in the last year of her life. Had she found them earlier, perhaps her fate would have been otherwise. Certainly she would have found a focal point, a pattern for her life, and a use for her extraordinary knowledge and intuition in Arab affairs.

\* \* \*

In July, 1900, she was back once more in Algeria, where she now began the most intense phase of her nomad life. It is impossible to realise the range of such a restless creature without studying the map where, even so, vast, overwhelming distances are telescoped between one pin-point and the next, and a finger-nail's span covers a trail which takes the camel caravans she so often followed as much as two months' march. She is everywhere, up and down the country: in the desert, in the oasis, across the High Plateaux. She is indulging her 'goût d'espace,' as she describes her ruling passion. She spends days and nights in Arab villages, sleeping on the filthy mud floors of a *fondouk*, or *caravansérai*. She follows the marauding tribes in the south till she is half-dead in the saddle. She is with the Spahis; spends days immobile, in contemplation of the Great Desert: is in the squalid brothels with the troops. She tries to convert the Berbers to hygiene, but is too lazy to look after her own health. Now she is integrated into one of the religious societies, the Kadryas, and dreams of becoming initiated into Soufisme, of becoming, perhaps, a woman priestess, a *marabout*, like Lallah Zeyneb. Her integration has practical benefits too: she is protected, and closer to the people of her choice.

She blazes with happiness—with triumph. On her horse Souf, followed by her dog Loupiote, she is off again. Her journals

record the intoxication of these days, drawn always further and further into the limitless distances. It was an elective affinity: 'I wanted to possess this country,' she wrote, 'and this country has possessed me.' She loves it all with passion: the people, their legends, their life. She is young, poetic, free. E. M. Forster has said that 'only in youth, only in the joyous light of morning can the lines of the oriental landscape be seen and the salutation accomplished.' I do not altogether agree, but that is neither here nor there. In Isabelle Eberhardt's case it was true. It was her morning, and she was greedy. Like Marvel, she could not make her sun stand still, yet she could make him run. No one ever tore their pleasures 'through the iron gates of life' more voluptuously than she. All, all was wonderful. She plunged. To appease her yearning for spiritual development there were long, reverent discussions with the religious leaders. Wisdom from the grey-beards. Lovers, ardent Arab lovers without number. She knew how to enjoy the senses blindly, brutally. There was hashish and anisette for forgetfulness, and always her wild dashes into the desert. Violent delights. Although, writing of her wanderings in the Sud-Oranais, where she lived alone, or with the nomads, she speaks of the quality of nothingness, 'the long hours with neither sadness nor boredom—nothingness—where one is nourished by silence. . . . I have never regretted one of those lost hours. . . . I felt myself immortal, and so rich, in my poverty.' And of the desert, again: 'In this country without vegetation, this country of stones, one thing exists—the hours. Here, sunrise and sunset are each a drama in themselves.'

But for Si Mahmoud there were always many other kinds of drama too. At El-Oued she encountered a Spahi, Slimène Ehnni, an Arab quartermaster of the garrison, who spoke French well, and was even naturalised French. He was a handsome, rather ordinary young Arab, it seems, with consumptive tendencies. But they fell in love, madly. He is Adam to her Eve, and they are in Paradise. They exchange burning letters and keep delicious secret rendezvous—secret from whom, one wonders? For who was there, now, in all the world, to care who Isabelle loved, or how? Unless perhaps the shadow of Augustin fell across the palms that formed their alcove.

Soon there were no more secrets of the alcove. They talked of marriage: their ecstasies would endure: nourished on such a love, they would need little else. Still, a grocer's-store or a 'café



maure' would be a good idea: something to assure their lodging, and a few sous over for cigarettes. Slimène's brother could run it for them when they felt the urge for the desert. But even this modest utopia needed cash. Slimène's pay was negligible. Isabelle had rashly entrusted the settlement of her mother's inheritance to Augustin, who in turn abandoned it to a shady lawyer. *Nitchevo! . . . Mektoub!* The lovers abandoned themselves to wilder transports, and were consoled.

Isabelle, or Si Mahmoud, was for Slimène at once man and woman, the young boy, or *bel idéal* of so much oriental literature. She had become completely accepted by the Arabs, most of whom knew her to be a woman, but respected both her and her disguise. Her affiliation to the Kadryas, and her friendship with Si Lachmi, their Sheik, had assured her position among them, and at this time she saw no Europeans. In January 1901, as an initiate to the order, she went into religious retreat, studying their mystical tenets. One cannot help wondering if Slimène felt neglected by these sudden withdrawals, but perhaps he was sufficiently enthralled to accept his cavalier mistress as she was.

So far, her life had been a picturesque curtain-raiser to the Orientalism of her choice. On January 29th the drama proper began. She was with a religious pilgrimage of Kadryas headed by Si Lachmi at the village of Béhima, near El-Oued. But a rival religious sect, the Tidjanis, had marked her down. An infidel, a woman, a Kadrya—an enemy spy. She must perish. While she was in the act of translating a letter for an illiterate Arab, she was struck by a fanatic wielding a sword which glanced off her head, but nearly severed her wrist. It was a Tidjani, who said Allah had commanded him to destroy Si Mahmoud.

Uproar! Isabelle was bleeding to death while murmuring she forgave her attacker. The fanatic prayed and feigned madness; the Kadryas were in a ferment. The French intervened, and Isabelle was taken to the military hospital, to recover slowly. The Tidjani was arrested, pending trial. Rumours, accusations, and uneasiness simmered. The atmosphere grew hostile. Slimène was posted to Batna. The trial, which was to be held in the Military Courts, was fixed for June 18th. It was a unique occasion for the French colony. The fabled Amazon of the desert, the *déclassée* ex-European journalist, the ambiguous cavalier, the scandalous creature. . . . The press of Algiers descended in a body to pack the tiny fly-blown court-room. The verdict was bewildering.

While the fanatic was sentenced to twenty years' hard labour, the victim was expelled from North Africa. Even those who most disliked Si Mahmoud found it unjust. But she could be used by the Kadryas to ferment trouble against the Tidjanis. The pacification of the Sahara was not yet complete. The French feared any excuses for local disturbances. She must go.

Was it only the work of a religious fanatic? Or were there other motives? Was it planned by a personal enemy, or by political *agents provocateurs*? Or even, as some say, inspired by the French? It is possible. The puzzle has never fitted into place. The attitude of certain French officials is unexplained. Did Si Lachmi, probably her lover, think it convenient to liquidate her as an awkward encumbrance likely to meddle dangerously in Arab affairs, and those of his confraternity, the Kadryas, in particular? Nothing is impossible for the time, place, and people concerned. From her journals, it seems that Si Mahmoud herself never had any suspicions of other, sinister undercurrents. To her, it must have seemed a continuation of the violent traditions she had first encountered with 'l'affaire Morés.'

In despair, Isabelle Eberhardt left for Marseilles, where, cut off from her lover and the country of her choice, she speaks in her journal of an attempted suicide. She was not an efficient person in affairs of every-day life, and she did not achieve her attempted suicides either. Such attempts run like a dark thread through the uneven pattern of her life. They were a recurrent theme, a seeming solution. After her mother's death; on her expulsion from Africa; with Augustin and his wife, at some particularly black moment where she notes, 'a collective suicide would be no solution' . . . or later, with Slimène at Ténès, where they were involved in the scandal of the elections and its mud-slinging, and had not the money to pay even the rent of their one room. Here her miseries reached culmination, and the suicide was to be no impetuous gesture, but a premeditated, voluptuous withdrawal, a suicide pact. She left Slimène a note, and went ahead to the fatal rendezvous. 'Let us kill ourselves to-night, outside the town. Bring your revolver and some absinthe.' The passive, already consumptive Slimène offered no resistance. They kept the rendezvous, but not the pact. After finishing the absinthe and reciting Arab poetry they fell asleep. In the morning light the revolver seemed too dramatic, and they renewed their daily round which was, in fact, hardly less so.

But, exiled to Marseilles, in a small back room, life was worth nothing. Between Russian and French lawyers Isabelle Eberhardt had lost the last of her mother's legacy. From her Russian stronghold of married propriety Trophimowsky's widow claimed the Geneva villa in the name of her late husband, regardless of the fact it was the wronged General de Moerder's money which had originally purchased this melancholy abode of free love and higher thought. When at last the legal machinations were done, Isabelle Eberhardt's share was reduced to a deficit of sixty francs.

She was steeped in misery now : misery without end : no hope, no ray of light : she wallowed, misery for misery's sake. 'One must never look for happiness : one meets it by the way—but it is always going in the opposite direction.' She was never one to go out after happiness, as an end in itself. On the contrary—'When I suffer, I begin to live.'

She now wrote some of the admirable short stories and sketches later to appear in *L'Akhbar*, the Algerian paper, and more, which were collected and edited so excessively, after her death. Those which were not over-varnished, a fate which befell so much of her simple, sensitive writing, can be compared, in the few stories collected by her biographer, R. L. Doyon, *Au Pays du Sables*, with those handled by M. Barracaund in *Dans l'Ombre chaude d'Islam*. Her notes and *Mes Journaliers* give further examples of her own style : above all, her absence of those pseudo-poetic fancies grafted on, pretentiously, by other hands. She has certain tricks, Loti-esque touches, the clichéd oriental melancholies of her epoch, but she penetrated the country and was one with the people as few other Europeans have ever been. Although she herself posed, she never presented herself, in her writings, in Loti's manner of romanticised wishful-thinking. She was far more objective. It is not how she writes, but of what she writes which is her strength. She wrote organically, naturally, as she spoke and lived. There was little craft and no technique. She was quite undisciplined. When she felt like it, she wrote, and it was good. If she was lazy, which she often was, or not in the mood, she remained idle for weeks. She was, in fact, an amateur.

In a letter to M. Abd-ul-Wahab, she writes of her work in these terms : 'The ambition to make a name, a position for myself by my pen (something in which I have little confidence, and do not hope to achieve) is for me on the second plane. I write because I like the "Processus" of literary creation : I write like I love,

because it is my destiny, probably. It is my only true consolation.' She speaks, too, of 'that great Unknown which is the only refuge of tormented souls.' One wonders what it was, precisely, which made Si Mahmoud such a tormented soul, and one falls back on *l'âme slave*, which obligingly covers such a multitude of obscure neurasthenias.

While rotting and raging in Marseilles, she was corresponding with Brieux, who admired her work, but could not persuade any Parisian editors to publish it. She was writing, too, to anyone whom she thought could help her rejoin Slimène: her projected marriage was now an obsession, an obstinate craving for the unattainable. Her feminist friend Lydia Paschkoff became bored and disillusioned by Si Mahmoud's domestic goal. Was it for this the nomad had ranged abroad? Was the Mazeppa of the desert to rock a cradle? Their friendship cooled, and there are no more letters of advice. Isabelle Eberhardt was now penniless, and worked as a docker. She was in a mood to savour any form of misery, even rupturing herself on the Quai Joliotte. Parts of her novel *Le Trimardeur* are autobiographical and belong to this moment of her life.

But suddenly her luck seemed to change. The good offices of Colonel Rancogne obtained Slimène's transfer. On October 17th, 1901, they were married in Marseilles and Si Mahmoud laid aside her burnous for the day, to wear an odd assembly of borrowed female clothing. Since her Moslem fervours had led her to shave her head, leaving only the ritual top-knot by which to be transported to Mahommed's Paradise, European woman's dress now implied false hair as well as furbelows.

But married life in a slum room behind the port was not for Isabelle and Slimène. There is squalor and squalor. They craved the foudouks and kasbahs, even if there were flies and filth. They returned to the 'âpre et splendide Mahgreb.' As Mme Si Ehnni, Isabelle was no longer an expatriate Slav, and she could not be refused entry. Slimène had left the army and looked for work. During these last months, Isabelle had been working on his education with remorseless zeal. He was to be dragged up the intellectual heights, somehow. Besides the more conventional classic authors, Isabelle considered Zola of great sociological importance. Slimène ploughed on, dutifully.

Having no resources, they were now obliged to lodge with Slimène's family. The claustrophobic atmosphere was almost as

bad as Marseilles. Their burning hey-day of love declined, imperceptibly. Si Mahmoud was stifled. Soon, she was off again, heading south for the M'zab. Slimène, now nominated Khodja or secretary to the Commune Mixte of Ténès, a small provincial town near Algiers, awaited her return.

On July 7th, 1902, this odd couple arrived at Ténès on the coach from Orléansville. They rented a modest room on the outskirts of the town. An inkpot, some straw mats for beds, a casserole, and some rickety bookshelves were all their household goods. But there were Isabelle's books. Dostoievsky, Nadson, the poet of her adolescence, Turgenev, Zola, the Goncourts, and, of course, Loti. A rather morbid lot.

Robert Randau has left a portrait of her at this time: elegant and slim, dressed *à la cavalier*, in an immaculate white burnous, and the high red boots of the Spahis, she had black eyes of a striking brilliance, a livid face, high cheekbones, and reddish hair. Under the turban, near the ears, and round the discoloured lips, the skin had a yellowish, parchment tinge. Robert Randau was much intrigued by his strange caller. He goes on to say she had a discordant, nasal voice (this seems to have struck everyone who knew her), swore vigorously, but had a curious dignity, and absolutely no sex-appeal. Elsewhere, he speaks of her gentleness, 'Her face, very soft, was that of an adolescent, and she had the smile of a child.'

Robert Randau was an outstanding personality in Algiers, a writer and civil servant, cultivated, generous, and loyal. He and his wife came to love and understand Si Mahmoud, and they stood by her later, when the storm broke. Settled at Ténès, Isabelle Eberhardt began writing intermittently for *L'Akhbar*. Its mildly pro-Arab tone, its sympathy with 'La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme,' whose ideals were so often quoted by aspiring Arabs, agreed with her own. Sévèreine, the woman writer who always snubbed her during her lifetime, summed her up posthumously as a disciple of Bakunin: but she was far too fatalistic to make real revolutionary stock. Her sympathies were with the under-dog, she believed romantically in justice and equality, and found much to criticise in the anti-Semitic, anti-Arabic policies of many Algerian officials. Basically, however, she was too lazy to participate in any active political movements. Her revolts always took the form of evasions.

The old ways of childhood, the nights of talk centred round the samovar had left their mark. She transposed them to the *cafés maures*, where, cross-legged on a mat, beside a pipe of *kif*, or hashish,



rolling her cigarettes, or drinking anisette, she talked wildly or morbidly, or gaily, or any way she felt, all through the hot African nights. Now she was becoming a legendary figure, though there was always a good deal of cold-shouldering by more conventional, perhaps envious, ladies. She had an audience wherever she appeared. Journalists, writers, painters, Arab chiefs. Si Mahmoud was like no one else, and they hung on her words. Sometimes she would quit a group of her European friends for the long, stylised exchange of Arab courtesies and veiled allusions which are the formal, traditional conversational opening among Arabs: she would stand, reverently bowed, before some bearded patriarchal figure, and return to the European group visibly moved by the encounter. She was indifferent to public opinion, European opinion, that is, and rather liked to flutter the dovescotes with her adventures, or to hurl a bombshell, such as one which stilled the tinkle of coffee-cups at a word, when she plunged into a dissertation on the *voluté* of submission, citing an adventure in the Sud-Oranais where she had been living in camp, and on the march, with the *Légionnaires*: a romantic, brutal adventure of sadistic flavour and erotic inference. Sometimes she spent the evening sobbing, overcome with absinthe and *weltschmerz*, and perhaps, deeper, more bitter than all else, her perpetual craving for the Absolute, the unattainable mystical peace of Soufisme. Far horizons, the Infinite, the Absolute—they were all one. She had the true mystic's unappeased hunger. Sometimes there were luxuriant monologues of misery and self-pity. Riding back from a moonlight picnic outside Ténès, last of the cavalcade, she turned abruptly to Robert Randau. "Ah! if you only knew how I abominate this country. It drives me to excesses. . . . I detest cultivated green country full of crops. Why do I have this morbid craving for a barren land and desert wastes? [What she calls 'la phantasmagorie de pierre, en pleine vie minérale.'] Why do I prefer nomads to villagers, beggars to rich people? *Aie yie yie!* for me, unhappiness is a sort of spice. Oh, yes! I'm very Russian at heart. I love the knout! And I love to be pitied when I'm knouted, too. . . . I don't hate my enemies [here she refers to the animosity which was centering round her in Ténès] any more than I hate the madman who tried to kill me at Béhima,—nor would I hate the executioner who was preparing the rope with which to hang me. I have no hatred for them, because, thanks to them, through them, perhaps, I may arouse compassion in others. Yet all my friends in Algiers—you,

too, and everyone here, you are *hard*. You don't understand me, and you never will, since I'm not of your blood. *How many fields of wheat, how many vineyards there are, between you and me!* I hate the Law—yes, chiefly because of its indifference. I want to feel—to make others feel— And anyhow, I've drunk too much absinthe to-night. . . . I'm drunk, drunk to my soul." Here is the Russian soul, *l'âme slave* in full cry.

Poor pathetic Si Mahmoud ; so muddled, so maddening. She was by fits and starts childish and complicated, dignified and unstable, wildly optimistic and absurdly pessimistic. Yet, with all her excesses she retained a style—a breeding. Often she seemed too lazy to live. She neglected her work, herself ; letters and bills and messages remained unanswered. She abandoned herself to poverty and inertia. Her diseases multiplied : such freedoms had their price. She made no efforts to be cured. Her teeth began to rot. On her journeys she carried a revolver (well hidden) but no toothbrush. With her high domed forehead, and Kalmuck face, above all, her irritating nasal voice, she cannot have been an engaging figure. Yet she inspired some people with a profound affection which nothing could shake. Among the Arabs she was increasingly respected ; indeed she was venerated. By her many acts of piety and kindness she had earned her title of 'la bonne Nomade.'

But at Ténès she was given no quarter. The colony, censorious and sour, turned on her unctuously. When the whole dirty business of local elections came to a head, she and Slimène were accused of buying Arab votes, even accepting bribes, among other equally false inventions. Isabelle Eberhardt defended herself from the charges, and both she and her husband were cleared : indeed, the cunning by which they had been used as scape-goats was revealed ; but the mud stuck, and she felt it bitterly. Not that sort of mud, for her. The whole squalid series of political and local intrigues are too involved to recount here. It is sufficient to say that several candidates for the local elections and both pro- and anti-Arab factions were involved, as well as many influential citizens of Algiers, who did much long-range condemnation.

One day, the Soviets will remember that Isabelle Eberhardt was Russian by birth, and it will be easy to make her a dramatic martyr figure ; one of them, ideologically. The *moujik* beneath the bur-nous, little sister of the oppressed. The Cossack of the desert, off on her mission of universal brotherhood, persecuted by the



LESLEY BLANCH

degenerate West, so cynical in their exploitation of the wretched Arab. They have something there, but not enough ; and Si Mahmoud's conduct will require a lot of explanation, before it can be brought into Party line, from the viewpoint of purposeful living.

Her persecutions were very real, very cruel ; and she did champion the Arabs, yet she remained convinced of the basic advantages of French administration. She was always the first to influence the Arabs to profit by French medicine and education. She belonged to that generation of free-thinking liberal Slavs who looked, from Siberia, from everywhere, towards France as the focal point of all true liberalism.

But to return to Ténès. The scandal had assumed such proportions that apart from the effect which it had on Arab opinion, Administrative investigations were made, and presently, new appointments cleared the air. However, life had become increasingly disagreeable for Si Mahmoud and Slimène. Once again, it was obvious that she was a centre of disturbance and had better go : at any rate, till after the elections. When Victor Barracaund, in Algiers, offered her board and lodging (it seems a minimum wage) in return for her services on his newspaper *L'Akhbar*, she accepted eagerly. The grocer's-store remained as far away as ever, but newspaper work interested her. It promised opportunities—excuses, perhaps, for further vagabond journeys in the desert. Soon, the *Dépêche Algérienne* commissioned her to make a reportage in the Sud-Oranais, on the borders of Morocco, where the then Colonel Lyautey was subduing the hostile tribes and organising the new French politics of peace. She was enraptured. This was the work she was born to do, to which all her life had led her. The shabby intrigues of Ténès were forgotten. In a state of exaltation she saw herself exploring the central Sahara, or penetrating the mysterious Hoggar : once again, she was indulging her *goût d'espace*.

\* \* \*

In the autumn of 1903 she was in the Sud-Oranais, and there are many people who have left accounts of her at that time. The journalist Rodés, reporting the border skirmishes and hard fighting of the Légionnaires and Goums against the rebel tribes, encountered Isabelle Eberhardt at Beni-Ounif. She moved in on him in his miserable little hotel room, and together, they wrote their dis-

patches, exchanged experiences, and lived in good companionship. Isabelle Eberhardt preferred to sleep on the floor—she had long lost the habit of beds; she often made the round of the *guinguettes* with the young officers, where she tried to out-drink them with mixtures of kummel, chartreuse, and cointreau. Sometimes such bravadoes ended in the gutter and her friends would carry her back to the inn, where she would lie groaning on the mat, wailing in her flat nasal tones that she was the most miserable of beings, miserable, wretched outcast. . . . Once, dragging her revolver from her belt, she tried to blow out her brains, and Rodes was nearly shot, taking it from her. Or, overcome with desires, she would rage round the tiny room, "I want a *tirailleur*! I must have a *tirailleur*!" And if any French friends offered themselves, she would repulse them, uncompromisingly. She was known to take only Arab lovers, which was an added irritant to her European detractors. In the words of one who knew her well, 'She drank more than a *Légionnaire*, smoked more *kif* than a hashish addict, and made love for the love of making love.'

It is possible that her violent cravings, her need for drink and humiliation, were the heritage of her Asiatic blood. Gorki's *Lower Depths* was peopled with such; a tormented lot. Perhaps, too, she justified her needs by her acquired religious tenets. She may have been influenced, very young, by the opinions of her Turkish suitor, who, in a letter to Trophimowsky, wrote, 'I have always thought, according to our revered Prophet, that the only true well-being is here, on earth. . . . Instead of learning, in the manner of bastard Christianity, to despise the earth and Nature's laws, Islam counsels us to love it, and study it, since God has made it all for our delight, and it is only ignorance which brings unhappiness.' No one could say that Si Mahmoud held back.

Her perfect command of Arabic impressed all those who knew her. She spoke not only the dialects of the people, but the classic, ritualistic Arabic of tradition, enjoying the savour of such exchanges as she had with the savants and marabouts, as much as it was apparent they enjoyed talking with her. After nights of feverish excess, she was able to be in the saddle at dawn, for a punishing ride into the battle areas, to observe, or perhaps to assist at some *pourparler*. Or she could shed all her love of action to live among the most venerated religious brotherhoods, such as the retreat she made, in the summer of 1904, at Kenadza, in the Zaouïa Zianya of the Marabout Sidi Brahim Ould Mohamed. Here, ravaged by

her increasingly severe bouts of malaria, she meditated among the other inmates, sharing their religious offices, and left, chalked on the walls of her cell in her graceful Arabic script, a pastel-toned aphorism, 'The world moves towards the tomb as the night towards dawn.'

The Arabs either accepted, or ignored, the wild side of her character. Probably they recognised the religious mystic behind the libertine's mask. But for Europeans this hidden aspect of Si Mahmoud's true nature was unsuspected until the publication of her journals, many years after her death. Even then, many could not accept that the senses and the spirit could be interdependent manifestations of each other, or that a transmutation from sexual ecstasies to mystic communion was known to most religions.

In Si Mahmoud's own words: 'Et moi, je sais encore des musiques plus étranges et plus fortes, des musiques qui font saigner le cœur en silence, celles que des lèvres ont murmurées, des lèvres absentes qui boiront d'autres souffles que le mien, qui respireront une autre âme que la mienne, parce que mon âme ne pouvait pas se donner, parcequ'elle n'était pas en moi mais dans les choses éternelles, et que je la possède enfin dans la profonde, dans la divine solitude de toute ma chair offerte à la nuit du Sud.'

I leave this splendidly purple passage in its original. I do not think the Russian soul, expressed in French, would stand yet another transposition.

The Bach-agma Si Moulâi always dismissed any aspersions on Si Mahmoud's character. This distinguished personage was emphatic. "I have never heard it said that Si Mahmoud's conduct lacked dignity," he replied, when questioned, after her death, and furthermore, he caused a street to be named after her in Ain-Sefra. The Sheik Belaredj of the Zaouïa Zianya of Kenadza, where she was in religious retreat, who died only in 1934, has left a charming picture of her. 'Here Si Mahmoud was our guest; during the day he meditated, rested, or wrote, and at twilight he wandered in the garden accompanied by a slave.' It will be noticed the Arabs always spoke of her as a man. They accepted or in some cases believed her disguise. "We were told Si Mahmoud was a woman, but we did not believe it," was the reply of one marabout.

From the time that Si Mahmoud was an accredited correspondent, following the military operations round Figuig, or Colomb-Bechar, and the penetration of the Sahara, her true worth began to be recognised. In the eyes of the military she was no longer the

suspect of El-Oued, but even a valuable member of their *deuxième bureau*. To the colony in Algiers she was still a scandal, but her conduct was much ameliorated by the fact she was now celebrated, a woman war-correspondent, and above all—the friend of Lyautey.

Now, both French authorities and Arabs admired and trusted her. She was presented to the then Colonel Lyautey in October 1903. He was, in the words of one who saw them together, 'literally enchanted by the strange creature.' He protected her and gave her many privileges; above all, a pass, enabling her to roam at will. It is said that he was Si Mahmoud's lover: but then everything was said of both Lyautey and Isabelle Eberhardt. It is certain they spent much time together, 'talking Sahara' as General Catroux put it. It is also certain that she enjoyed Lyautey's confidence and that he entrusted her with several delicate missions among the Arab leaders. His trust, before all else, establishes Si Mahmoud's political integrity. It might also be taken to prove that however diseased she may have been, her brain was not affected. 'Dieu connaît les choses cachées et la sincérité des témoignages,' she wrote in her journal, thinking, perhaps, of past injustices.

But she had come into her kingdom too late. At last her life seemed to follow the pattern she had once wished, full of danger and romance and freedom. 'Le goût d'espace,' 'le droit du vagabondage,' are recurrent phrases in the journal. Far distances, movement, were always her drug and her stimulus. She speaks of the blessed annihilation of self in the contemplative desert life. 'La route vers le lointain inconnu.' Clichés of freedom: but there speaks the last of the romantic nineteenth-century wanderers. The motor age would have killed her, like domesticity. When Robert Randau asked her what she would do if she were to have a child, she replied that she would be a good mother, like all Russian women, but she did not want children.

Her love for Slimène remained, in spite of her many absences and adventures. In her journal she records that she can never thank God enough for the beauty and goodness of Slimène's soul. But she also left it on record that he was the perfect lover. She calls him Rouh', 'beloved,' and speaks of their meetings in the desert, far from everything, to enjoy their dreams . . . 'dreams alternating with hours of madness and pleasure.' But now she seldom saw Slimène. He was resigned to her way of life and left her free: maybe he began to find her rather too exhausting. They were together only occasionally, she journeying to the

rendezvous from wherever her reportage had led her, and he patiently travelling as much as 1,000 kilometres from his post in the north. Her reportages now attracted much attention. They appeared in the *Dépêche Algérienne*, though sometimes she told people she was reporting for the *Journal de Paris*. If this was so, nothing was ever published in its pages. It is probable she was inventing : she whose whole life was wildly romantic, still enjoyed such little flourishes.

But if she sometimes invented or distorted facts about herself, all that she wrote otherwise had the ring of truth. This is one of her greatest charms. She writes about things which are to most people exotic and far removed, and she writes of them objectively, and subjectively too. She saw them, was conscious of them, with the entranced eye of a newcomer, yet she understood and was part of the scene as no ordinary enraptured beholder could be. Thus, for example, she will describe the life in a religious order, in retreat, as it was, as they lived it, and as no European could come to know it, while preserving her detached, European sense of wonder and interest in all about her. She wrote of life in the lonely desert *bordj*, or forts ; of the *Légionnaires*, the bazaars, foxy lawyers, children, old women, the dramas of everyday life in the verminous villages. Sometimes she would join the troops in their canteen, where she was always welcomed as good company, and very much respected, in spite of everything. She talked with the *Légionnaires* in their various tongues, though it was remarked her Russian was rather rusty. According to Colonel de Loustal, who had known her well, she had reached a state of melancholy which nothing could dispel for long. Her success had come too late. 'She did not complain, but one now sensed a bitter disillusion. She was a woman who expected nothing more from life. She was not yet thirty, but all attraction had vanished. She was ravaged by drink. Her voice was raucous. Her head was shaved, and she had no teeth left.' Malaria and probably syphilis were gaining on her. There was no future for her, and she must have known it. Slimène was consumptive. What life could there have been for her, growing old and infirm ? Was her passivity, her 'Mektoubisme,' her contemplative side strong enough to accept such an end ? Were her religious beliefs growing sufficiently profound to have compensated for the loss of all her violent physical living ? She was a tragic figure. Her life had been tragic, a tragi-comedy in parts, but her death, generally referred to as a tragedy, was not so, in



reality. She was blessed, for she escaped the prison of old age.

The acceleration of her last year was fevered. Did she, perhaps, have some premonition of the approaching end? She ranged the Sud-Oranais; she was at El Mounzar, at Ain-Sefra, and then in Algiers. In May 1904 she rode out into the *bled* once more, south, across the High Plateaux to Colomb-Bechar. She talked of pushing on, to In'Salah, in Touareg territory. But these vast distances now seemed to exhaust her mortally. When she took leave of her friends in Algiers, in May, she gave them a disordered bundle of papers and manuscripts. "If I don't come back," she said, in the detached, ironic tone she liked to assume, "take care of all these." And she added, "They may be useful for my funeral eulogy."

After her retreat at the Zaovia of Kenadza, at the end of the summer, her bouts of malaria became so severe she decided to go into hospital at Ain-Sefra, the little town on the edge of the Sahara, which she regarded as her base in the south, and which was a last outpost of the Colonial administration and the Foreign Legion. There Lyautey had built the barracks and offices, and the hospital on the high ground. Below, in the *oued* or bed of the ravine beside the dried-up stream, was the poorer part of the town—mudhuts, or *gourbi*, the school, and the brothels, with their pensionnaires. It was here Isabelle Eberhardt had rented a little shack.

On the morning of October 21st, Si Mahmoud was chafing to leave the hospital. She did not wait to see the doctor, who had advised her to stay longer. She left very early, about nine o'clock. If she had listened to the doctor, or even left later in the day, she would have escaped her death. But would she have wished to escape? With her suicidal tendencies, her growing melancholia, could she have foreseen, I believe she would have still chosen to go. She had a rendezvous with Slimène. They would make it a festival. There would be drink, and *kif*, and love; and drunk with all that, they would gallop off into the desert once more, into the far horizons. It was a heavy, thunderous morning, and already the yellowish waters of the *oued* were rising, boiling down through the narrow ravine, as they often did at this time of the year. Suddenly, around eleven o'clock, a roaring torrent broke loose from the mountains, flooding the *oued*, carrying with it houses, cattle, trees, people. Si Mahmoud had reached the shack, and was seen on the rickety balcony, very still, watching the tide of disaster as it swept round. She was never seen again, alive. The



waters roared higher with furious impact. The little clay houses literally melted as they collapsed. On the high ground the garrison watched, powerless. Hours later the flood abated and a temporary bridge was contrived. The rescue parties searched for the living, for the dead. There were many lives lost; whole families of Arabs, school-children, and the inmates of the brothels. Slimène seemed stunned. It was rumoured she had been washed down stream and was saved. No one had seen her. Lyautey ordered the search to continue. In icy water, by lantern light, his soldiers hunted in vain. Two days later her body was found, pinned beneath a fallen beam. She had been drowned in the desert. Lyautey thought that she had made no effort to escape, and that in a sort of passive exaltation, she had allowed death to overtake her; the long-sought suicide at last.

Lyautey detailed troops to sift through the rubble and ruins, to search for all her missing papers and manuscripts, which were collected in sodden fragments and later sent, sealed, by special messenger to Barracaund, in Algiers. Lyautey ordered her burial in the Moslem cemetery of Aïn-Sefra, and chose a simple marble stone, with her name, Si Mahmoud, in Arabic, and the rest in French. She lies there, a little removed from the other graves, and facing the desert she loved. Slimène seems to have been absent from the funeral; her few possessions left in Ténès were auctioned by his orders. In a last gesture of pride for his wife's European background, he published one of those black-bordered funeral announcements, so floridly grief-stricken, so eloquent of 'pompe funèbre.'

It is an extraordinary mixture of people, races, and classes who mourn '*leur épouse, sœur, belle-sœur, alliée et tante, décédée dans la Catastrophe d'Aïn-Sefra . . .*' an odd mixture of names all united on the formal card. Humble Arab clerks or interpreters, high military officials in Warsaw, and Poltava; others in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at St. Petersburg. Augustin, listed as '*Professeur d'Allemand à Marseilles.*' Geneva tradespeople, more Arabs. . . .

Apart from Slimène, it was probably only Augustin, of all these relatives, who truly mourned Isabelle Eberhardt.

But for her friends she left an aching sense of loss. Lyautey mourned her not only as a friend, but as a valuable collaborator, though he expressed the view that she had attained the sum of her life, and was already on the eve of decline. 'Poor Mahmoud!'

he wrote. 'I loved her for what she was, and for what she was not. I loved her prodigious artistic temperament. . . . She was truly herself; a rebel.' There was a spate of lyrical funeral eulogies, mostly by people who had not known her, and several intense women writers seized the opportunity to interpret her life as a feminist crusade. In a fit of belated municipal pride, a street was named after her in Algiers, though as Robert Randau has pointed out, there is a sad symbolism in the fact that it begins in an inhabited quarter, and peters out into a waste land.

The posthumous exploitation of her work, and the deliberate distortion of her style by Victor Barracaund and others, was something which none of her friends forgave. Yet, for all their public indignation, they could not intervene. Si Mahmoud had become a legendary figure: besides, Barracaund had possession of most of her manuscripts. He considered that as he had been her editor, he could continue to present her work as he thought fit. Those who had seen Si Mahmoud's talents neglected, during most of her life, saw her, in death, vulgarised, and both her work and her person exploited.

To anyone who has lived in North Africa, Isabelle Eberhardt's writings,—in particular her journals, and *Notes de Routes*—are of profound interest. They do not date. I have barely touched the fringes of Arab life, but whenever I re-read her, I am struck again by her marvellous powers of evocation. The sour and spicy smell of Africa rises round me again: I see again the lumbering, groaning camels, 'with their strange heads, half-bird, half-serpent.' I hear the harsh, guttural cries of the nomads as they strike camp in the pale greenish light before sunrise. I hear the endless melancholy chants, and watch the far distances lift under the rising sun. These are the simple scenes that Isabelle Eberhardt knew and loved, as well as the dark dramatic histories of the people. She called them 'Les petits décors de vie.' She could evoke many landscapes: the harsh and splendid beauty of the Sud-Oranais, just as she could evoke the mortal boredom of the Légionnaires in *Dimanche au Village*; or the *Portrait de l'Ouled Naïl*, where she describes one of these fabulous prostitutes, both her outward mask, and her inward nature. 'A haunting face, the face of an idol . . . the face of a bird of prey.' She writes of the passion and subjection and fatalism of the oriental woman in an admirably unemotional style.

How vividly she conjures all the tumbling, spinning frenzies of

the negroes, in *Fête Soudanèse*. And she adds—'there is always something negroid in these leaping dances. The moorish dance—called *danse du ventre*, on the contrary, acquires, by certain languorous, slow poses, the significance of those sacred dances which stem from a more metaphysical East.'

A collection of her writings which Barracaund presented, much adulterated, under the highly coloured title *Dans l'Ombre Chaude d'Islam*, and, moreover, under his name alone, was an immediate success. Only some time later, in subsequent editions, was the name Isabelle Eberhardt added. The book went into many editions. 'La bonne Nomade' had become good business—for others Barracaund continued to re-work her originals into florid travesties, which while acceptable to the public of that moment are far removed from Isabelle Eberhardt's own writing. It is interesting to compare *L'Ombre Chaude d'Islam* with *Contes et Paysages*, published in 1925, the fruits of subsequently found and untouched manuscripts.

In the years immediately after her death Barracaund ignored all the protests of her friends. Robert Randau, in company with Noiré the painter, cornered him on the matter. They had been speaking of the curious variations of Isabelle Eberhardt's style: how she could write a purely mechanical reportage, good descriptive stuff, but photographic, rather than personal, and then suddenly produce impressive passages, particularly those of a starkly autobiographical nature. To which Barracaund replied that Isabelle Eberhardt was a mediocre writer, incapable of anything more than a reportage, and that all these revealing passages were his work, which he had deliberately inserted into her texts, so as to present her objectively. It was for this reason, he said, he had claimed joint authorship. But he was confounded, years later, with the publication of her notes and journals which had been discovered by chance, and were presented by René-Louis Doyon. These authentic manuscripts proved to be full of just such passages as Barracaund had claimed she was incapable of writing.

But before the real Isabelle Eberhardt was to emerge there were others, besides Barracaund, who exploited her shamefully. And still the half-known, ambiguous personality and writer remained to be truly assessed.

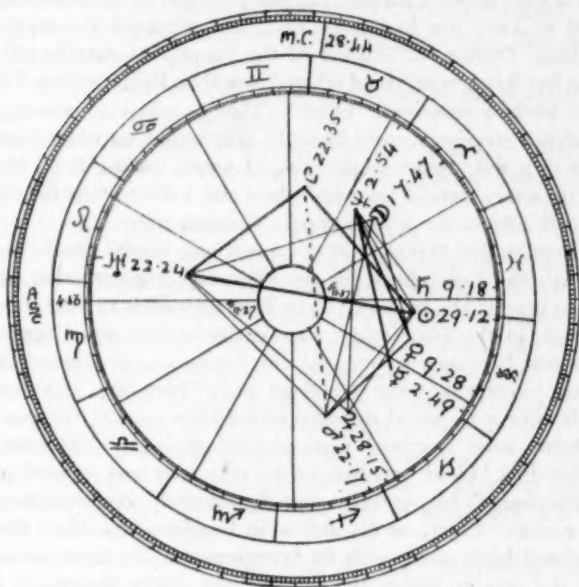
The manner in which *Mes Journaliers*, and with them the real woman, was discovered, is as strange as all the rest. In 1914 Mme Chloë Bulliod, a cousin of M. Gaillard, doyen of the Algerian press, was offered a sack full of Isabelle Eberhardt's papers, which

had escaped the catastrophe of Aïn-Sefra. One of Slimène's family had hawked it round Algiers, only vaguely sensing its value. It had been offered to Barracaund years before, but he had refused to buy it, insisting it should have been his by rights—by what rights it is difficult to imagine. At any rate, he had refused it, preferring, perhaps not unnaturally, to profit by his own versions than to be faced by new, authentic material. Admitting his point of view, it seems odd, all the same, that he did not acquire the manuscripts, if only to have avoided any awkward confrontations later. Madame Bulliod seems to have done nothing with the papers; but when, in 1921, René-Louis Doyon was passing through Bône, on a lecture tour, he learned of their existence. M. Doyon had been passionately interested in the Si Mahmoud legend for years, and the papers passed into his possession.

They were a chaotic collection of letters, journals, notes, bills, manuscripts in Arabic and Russian, legal documents from the High Courts of Moscow; maps, caricatures, verses, and the rather weak but graphic little sketches Si Mahmoud liked to make of the African scene. Most important, most revealing of all, her journals. From these, as wild and disordered as their owner had been, her true image emerged. René-Louis Doyon published *Mes Journaliers*, and worked out a new biography, settling many questions of her origin and background which had puzzled even her closest friends. He established authoritatively the real Isabelle Eberhardt.

But biographies, however exact, do not affect legendary auras. Isabelle Eberhardt has passed into legend: so good, so bad, so weak, so strong: so simple, yet so complicated . . . poor Si Mahmoud, 'la bonne Nomade,' maligned and persecuted—yet free—free of all the little deadly fetters of everyday life: the petty spites too: cavorting off into the desert, sleeping where she fell, racked with fever, consumed with passions. Longing for a little grocer's-shop: seeing herself as a marabout, a pious and venerated priestess. Writing of extraordinary things with banality. Writing with simplicity of spiritual problems and her own tormented *âme slave*. She was a legend in her lifetime, and she has remained one.

## AN ASTROLOGICAL POSTSCRIPT



### HOROSCOPE OF ISABELLE EBERHARDT

(BY EQUAL HOUSE SYSTEM)

Born Geneva, 6.0 p.m., 17.2.1877

Ascendant, 4° 56' Virgo M.C., 28° 44' Taurus. Sun 29° 12' Aquarius.

Mercury, ruler of Ascendant in Aquarius. Uranus, ruler of Sun-sign  
in Leo.

As I wandered about North Africa tracking down the Eberhardt legend, I used to watch the *deguez* or fortune-tellers crouched in the dust, mumbling their incantations, trapping Destiny in a tray of sand. I remembered how Isabelle Eberhardt had embraced that aspect of Islam, too. She had become as superstitious as any illiterate Bedouin. She often consulted these *deguez*. In her journal she writes of visiting 'un sorcier de la rue du Diable.' 'Acquired the certain proof of the *reality* of this incomprehensible and mysterious science of magic. . . .'

I know nothing about astrology but I feel an instinctive respect for it. Not for the fatuities of the Sunday newspapers but rather for its age-old traditions. I cannot dismiss it as mumbo-jumbo because its terms are incomprehensible to me. I accept that it can be a charting of a moment of time. Jung, speaking of basic archetypes, has said 'whatever is born or done at this moment of time has the qualities of this moment of time.'

#### AN ASTROLOGICAL POSTSCRIPT

I have always thought Isabelle Eberhardt would be a remarkable subject. I decided to have her horoscope cast, and obtained the name of Mrs. M. E. Hone, Director of Studies of the Faculty of Astrological Studies. I wrote to her from Switzerland where I was then living, asking if she would undertake to do a horoscope 'blind.' That is, without knowing anything of the subject concerned, as I thought this would be more interesting—and more of a test, cynics might add. I wrote, calling her 'Miss E.' I gave the necessary data of time and place and I added that the life seemed to be a rich subject for a horoscope. Nothing more.

Mrs. Hone replied that she did not much care to do 'blind' horoscopes, for although the basic chart did not alter, the interpretation or reading could seem inaccurate, by lack of any facts on which to base the interpretation. But, in the same letter, she continued that since beginning her reply she had become curious, cast the horoscope, and found it of such exceptional interest that she would go on. There was, she wrote, some incertitude over a technical question of the time used at Geneva in 1877. (The present zone standard was adopted in 1894.) Meanwhile, she sent me her first 'blind' analysis of the character and general pattern of Isabelle Eberhardt's life, as well as listing, precisely, certain dates and outstanding events. Later, on my arrival in London, Mrs. Hone showed me the completed birth chart with its 'progressions' for later years and we discussed the way in which the life and the charts dovetailed together.

I think it of interest to publish this horoscope here, together with the first 'blind' reading. Sceptics will be irritated and unmoved, no doubt. But there it is. For those who have studied astrology it will be just one more illustration of astrological accuracy. For all the rest of us, uninitiated but open-minded, this reading of Isabelle Eberhardt's life and nature is curiously impressive.

L. B.

The following notes are taken from the first 'blind' interpretation, shorn of most technical terms. The italicised comments are my own:

'Here is a person of abundant creative force, with much sympathy, yet always a rebel, who must go her own way. A strongly individualistic nature.

'There should be something odd, or unusual, in her appearance. Her relations with others are odd, too. She devotes herself to them and their "causes" with pugnacious intensity, yet she seems to be denied complete fulfilment herself. She has great idealism and humanitarian instincts. An overflowing, restless energy in an unusual way, connected with others. Yet, a mystical nature. While full of heart, she seems to have brought some strain into her life, or suffered strain through over-sudden ridding herself of things and people she did not want.

'She is a pioneer in foreign lands.



#### AN ASTROLOGICAL POSTSCRIPT

'She should have achieved some prominence. If denied actual creativity in children, or a cause, she could be a remarkable actress. She may have taken the stage in some other way.

'There should be some special fragility of mind, of the nervous system, even though with a strong physique.

'A person of alternate moods and much pride. A life, in a way, in the hands of, or for, others. A very marked pre-occupation with sex, death, and the after-life.'

According to Mrs. Hone, three years stand out :

'Her 10th year. There would have been something in the nature of a loss, a tragedy, or a set-back.' *Her elder sister's flight from the Villa Neuve?*

'Her 20th year. A great falling in love or a uniting happiness. A consummation, fulfilment.' *The year of her removal to North Africa, her turning Mahomedan, and her first decisive living among, and with, Arabs.*

'Her 24th year. One of sudden changes, a crowded, dramatic year of many events and dangers. Of climax. Much to do with others ; possibly marriage too.' *The year she was initiated into the Kadryas : the year of her attempted assassination ; of her meeting with Barracaund. The year of her sentence of exile from North Africa ; of her marriage, and her final break with Europe, by returning to Africa as an Arab wife.*

*The astrological terms are precise :* 'The Sun by progression comes to exact aspect with no less than three planets which are themselves in precise aspect to each other in the horoscope. Thus it is indicated that this year must be one of climax.

'The 25th year shows that the life, which had been withdrawn, or artistic, but not materialistic, may now have begun to be more active, more canalised. It should have come into its full force about six years later, had she lived.

'Her death, apparently sudden, seems to have been more the fault of others than herself.'

## Heaven and Earth

BY PETER SUTCLIFFE

---

**A**LCALÁ DE LOS GAZULES : it was not far from Algeciras. He had come simply because there was no railway and the name had attracted him ; at first he had thought it meant gazelles. And as he had approached it by bus the previous evening, it had appeared more beautiful than anything he had yet seen. Glimpsing it for a moment at dusk between the converging hills, as the road curled upwards in low gorges, he had with a catch of his breath at first doubted his senses. An enchanted, fairy town, it had appeared, pyramid-shaped against a steep hill, reaching its apex in the church spire silhouetted against the darkening sky. Unbelievable, Gustave had murmured, momentarily transported.

But one morning in three, perhaps, Gustave awoke to remind himself that everything was still the same, that nothing had changed. He had come away—that was all. He was in the South, at last, where the immense blueness of the sky flowed like liquid into each gap between the branches of the trees, the roofs of houses, fitted like a glove and left no vacancy. That was very wonderful indeed to the northerner. But although the eye was never inactive here, it seemed that there was, in his case, some apathy of the senses, like silt in the bloodstream. The brilliant immediate southern vision was absorbed in the grey alluvial muds of the north which were deposited inside him. No matter where he went the naïve impact was deadened. He lived, he sometimes told himself, in a sound-proof, windowless shelter.

Moreover, he had slept badly. The dogs of the village had barked all night, and before dawn the cock in the yard had begun to scream hoarse tuneless messages to other cocks which answered forsakenly in the distance. Then, shortly after it came light, he discovered that the small hotel in which he was staying was built over the smithy, and the hammering of iron on iron racked his nerves for an hour until it eventually forced him to get up. The blow on the head as he left the building by the low front door only made him even less prepared for the hideous aspect of the bakery

in the daylight, with its façade of glossy brown tiles, its monumental bad taste.

So this morning, his head aching with sleeplessness and the blow he had received, it was the same old story. He was disappointed. He knew that it was not Alcalá de los Gazules that had let him down. As he turned away from the bakery, he saw the village clinging to the hill side, the white houses with the congestion of pink tiled roofs, yellowing with lichen, rising upwards towards the church and the old ruined castle—and it was all as beautiful as he had imagined. But there was something absent. It did no violence to him inwardly, as his northern soul craved. It did not live for him. And to be honest, as he climbed the steep cobbled path between the houses, walking in the shadow though it was only ten o'clock, he had to admit that he was bored.

Then suddenly he heard singing. It was not like any singing he had ever heard before, though it brought to his mind the image of monks in an ancient monastery kneeling beneath arches of grey stone, chanting together during winter nights. He stopped and looked down. Up the long winding cobbled street, between the white houses, two beggars came singing. They sang in unison, in deep voices. And the plain-song was so sad, so slow, so slow and laden with sadness, that the people in the street all stopped and looked at each other with troubled faces and the children were suddenly silent. A crowd gathered at the top of the hill, and looked down on the two men climbing slowly, infinitely slowly, upwards. One was blind, a stick wavered sensitively in his right hand. The socket had closed up like an old wound over one eye, the other stared up unseeing at the tops of the houses—a milk-white eyeball in the weathered, earthy face, a searching, unearthly stare. . . . His companion, who held his arm, was an old man—perhaps his father—with a wooden leg, a stump strapped to the thigh. His face was shrunken, emaciated, with an expression of almost terrifying gentleness. They were both dressed in rags. Slowly they laboured upwards ; for a moment in silence. Then together, the long chant was resumed, their voices joined in the trailing *Miseréré*, a lament of ineffable grief. It carried through the streets of the village, and it seemed to Gustave that the dirge echoed across the valleys and amongst the hills, for the atmosphere was so clear and pure that their voices could never lose their strength but must pierce the unresistant air uncannily, eternally.

He turned away, continued up the hill to the café. The haunting

chant followed behind him, the voices stationed themselves on each side of him like pillars of grey stone, swelling and soaring upwards. He entered the café and sat down at a table by the door. He was excited by queer suppressed instincts of pity and piety. He would have liked to give money to the two beggars, to give lavishly, but nothing could have persuaded him to wait until they had completed their tortured ascent of the hill. At each step the plangency of their voices had become more unbearable ; if they had come nearer to him he felt that he would have been unable to endure it.

He ordered a coffee. At the next table a eunuch with crutches was engaging in conversation, speaking in a crackling fluent soprano. He was about twenty-five. His face was of an ashen and sickly pallor, unlined. The bones in his fingers were white and sharp as his hand rested on the table. In his eyes an expression of bewildered and unhappy innocence.

Gustave drank his coffee, rich sweet coffee with goat's milk. As he gazed out of the open door, averting his eyes from the eunuch, an old woman in black passed. She was hooped by disease, some freakish ague, her chin almost at her ankles, a little black ball of age and pain. She was more like some monstrous specimen of plant life than of humanity. Contracted, she barely reached the height of Gustave's thighs.

He felt as if he might tremble. What a country ! he thought. What ghastly degradations, what abysmal suffering ! And he was palpitating with a dreadful wild emotion, an upwelling of vivid energy. After a moment he recognised the evidences of joy.

Having paid for his coffee, he went out again into the street. At a great pace he went on up the hill towards the old church on the summit, through the narrowing deteriorating streets where the boys ran naked, with brown baked bodies—fine sturdy graceful bodies, and twisted rickety legs—and the animals and the people lived together in the dark hovels. He glimpsed the straw on which they slept, the old women squatting on the floor in sacks tied round them with string, and then he was up above the town in the free air by the walls of the old castle tufted with storks' nests. He stood still, breathing deeply. A wicked vitality was pulsing through the silted bloodstreams of his northern frame. The blueness of the sky flowed into each gap and left no vacancy, and the dipping undulations of the countryside were celestial with silence. The silence seized him, the immense transcendent silence which was alive with small sounds. Birds sang, chunnering in the crumbling tower of

PETER SUTCLIFFE

the castle, a cuckoo called from the woods, the hollow notes of the goat bells were ringing on the slopes below, insects were whirring in the grass, and there was even close by a tiny stream tinkling. But they were all ethereal, fairy noises against the great silence of the earth, the teeming quietness of the vegetation. Gustave felt layer after layer of grey crust peeling away from some central pulse of life. The two beggars, the hooped old woman, the eunuch and the poverty of the upper streets were the long-fingered roots groping in the dark earth. And above, between the spreading branches of humanity and dignity, the blue silence flowed, the birds floated on the silence and the wings of butterflies fanned the silence with silence. Gustave, spanning it all, heaven and earth, achieved a divine elasticity of spirit. At last he was content to ask no more questions and to come to grips with nothing.

## *A Bar of Shadow*

BY LAURENS VAN DER POST

*For William Plomer*

---

As we walked across the fields we hardly spoke. I, myself, no longer had the heart to try and make conversation. I had looked forward so eagerly to this Christmas visit of John Lawrence and yet now that he was here, we seemed incapable of talking to each other in a real way. I had not seen him for five years; not since we said goodbye at our prison gates on release at the end of the war, I to return to my civilian life, he to go straight back to the Army on active service. Until then for years he and I had walked as it were hand in hand with the danger of war and endured the same bitter things at the hands of the Japanese in prison. Indeed, when our release came we found that our experience, shared in the embattled world about us, fitted like a measured garment to the great and instinctive coincidence of affection we felt for each other. That moment of rounded nearness had stayed with me. There was no separation in it for me, no distance of purple leagues between him and me. I knew only too well the cruel and unnecessary alliance (unnecessary because either one of them is powerful enough) that time and distance contract for waging their war against our brief and brittle human nearnesses. But if I had managed to stay close, why should he have been set so far apart? For that is precisely what I felt. Although he was so near to me that I had but to half stretch out a hand to take his arm, never in five years of separation had he seemed so far away as now.

I stole a quick glimpse of him. The suit of pre-war tweeds which still fitted him perfectly, sat on his tall broad frame more like service uniform than becoming country garments and he was walking like a somnambulist at my side, with an odd unconscious deliberation and purposefulness, a strange, tranced expression on his face. His large grey eyes, set well apart under that fine and wide brow in a noble head, were blue with the distance between



us. Even the light of that contracting December afternoon, receding from the day like the grey tide of a stilled sea from a forgotten and forlorn foreshore fuming silently in the gathering mists of time, glowed in his eyes not like a light from without so much as the fading tones of a frozen wintry moment far back in some calendar of his own within. Their focus clearly was not of that moment and that place and the irony of it was almost more than I could bear without protest.

I don't know what I would have done if something unknown within me, infinitely wiser and more knowledgeable than my conscious self marching at his side in bitter judgement over this resumption that was not a resumption of our relationship, had not suddenly swept into command and ordered me to ask: 'You have not by any chance run into "Rottang" Hara again?'

The question was out before I even knew I was going to ask it and instantly I felt a fool at having put it, so irrelevant and remote from that moment did it seem. But to my amazement, he stopped short in his tracks, turned to me and, like someone released from an emotion too tight for him, said with obvious relief:

'It is curious you asking me that! For I was thinking of him just then.' He paused slightly and then added with an apologetic laugh, as if he feared being misunderstood: 'I have been thinking of him all day. I can't get him out of my mind.'

My relief matched his, for instantly I recognised a contact that could bridge his isolation. Here was a pre-occupation I could understand and follow a long way even if I could not share it to the end. Just the thought of Hara and the mention of his name was enough to bring the living image of the man as clearly to my senses as if I had only just left him and as if at any moment now behind me that strange, strangled, nerve-taut, solar-plexus voice of his which exploded in him when he was enraged, would shriek '*Kura!*'—the rudest of the many rude ways in Japanese of saying: 'Come here, you!'

At the thought the hair on the back of my neck suddenly became sensitive to the cold air and involuntarily I looked over my shoulder as if I really expected to see him standing at the gate by the Long Barn beckoning us with an imperious arm stretched out straight in front of him, and one impatient hand beating the air like the wings of a large yellow butterfly in its last desperate flutter before metamorphosis into a creeping and crawling thing on earth. But the field behind us, of course, was empty, and the great, grey

peace of winter, the tranquil and tranced benediction of a rest well earned by eager earth long wooed and well-beloved by man, lay over the tired and sleeping land. The scene indeed in that gently shrinking moment of daylight stood over itself as if it were an inner dream in the inmost sleep of itself, as if circumstances had contrived to make it conform absolutely to that vision which had made England a blessed thought of heaven on earth to us when we were in prison under Hara, and a rush of bitterness, rudely brushing aside the relief I had felt, went straight to my heart that Hara's twisted, contorted shape should still be able to walk this intimate and healing scene with us.

I said 'in prison under Hara' for though he was not the Commandant he was by far the greatest of the powers that ruled our prison world. He himself was only a third-class sergeant in His Imperial Japanese Majesty's forces and nominally we had a young subaltern in charge, but that slight young man more resembled an elegant character out of the novels of the great Murasaki or the pillow book of her hated rival than a twentieth-century Samurai. We seldom saw him and his interest in us seemed focussed only on the extent to which we could add in variety and number to his collection of wrist-watches. John Lawrence, who had once been assistant military attaché in Tokyo, said he was certain our commandant was not born in the great hereditary military classes of Japan but was probably a second-class Custom's official from Kobe or Yokohama who could therefore not be dishonoured as a real soldier would have been by an ignominious appointment to command a camp of despised prisoners of war. But Hara, he said, was the real thing, not of the officer class but the authentic feudal follower, unhesitatingly accompanying his master and overlords into battle. He had served his masters long and well, had fought in Korea, Manchuria, China, and this unexacting job now, presumably, was his reward.

I don't know how right Lawrence was, but one thing stood out: Hara had no inferiority complex about his officer. One had only to see them together to realise which was authentic, predestined military material and which merely deriving colour and benefit from war. Scrupulously correct as Hara was in his outward behaviour to his officer, we had no doubt that inwardly he felt superior. He never hesitated to take command of a situation when he thought it necessary. I have seen him on inspections walk rudely in between the Commandant and our ranks, haul out

someone who had unwittingly transgressed his mysterious code of what was due on these occasions, and in a kind of semi-conscious epilepsy of fury, beat the poor fellow nearly to death with anything that came to hand, while his disconcerted officer took himself and his refined-Custom-house senses off to a more tranquil part of the parade-ground. No! Not he but Hara ruled us with a cold, pre-determined, carefully conditioned and archaic will of steel as tough as the metal in the large, two-handed sword of his ancestors dangling on his incongruous pre-historic hip.

It was he, Hara, who decided how much or rather how little we had to eat. He ordained when we were driven to bed, when we got up, where and how we paraded, what we read. It was he who ordered that every book among the few we possessed wherein the word 'kiss' or mention of 'kissing' appeared, should be censored by having the offending pages torn out and publicly burned as an offence against 'Japanese morality.' It was he who tried to 'purify' our thinking by making us in our desperately undernourished condition go without food for two days at a time, confined in cramped and over-crowded cells, forbidden even to talk so that we could contemplate all the better our perverse and impure European navels. It was he who beat me because a row of beans that he had made my men plant had not come up and he put the failure down to my 'wrong thinking.' It was he who when drunk would babble to me endlessly about Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich whose faces haunted him. He who questioned me for hours about Knights of the Round Table, '606' Salvarsan and the latest drugs for curing syphilis. He mounted and controlled our brutal Korean guards, gave them their orders and made them fanatical converts, more zealous than their only prophet, to his outlook and mood. He made our laws, judged us for offences against them, punished us and even killed some of us for breaking them.

He was indeed a terrible little man, not only in the way that the great Tartar Ivan was terrible but also in a peculiarly racial and demonic way. He possessed the sort of terribleness that thousands of years of littleness might seek to inflict on life as both a revenge and a compensation for having been so little for so long. He had an envy of tallness and stature which had turned to an implacable hatred of both, and when his demon—an ancient, insatiable and irresistibly *compelled* aspect of himself that lived somewhere far down within him with a great yellow autonomy and

will of its own—stirred in him I have seen him beat-up the tallest among us for no other reason save that they were so much taller than he. Even his physical appearance was both a rejection and a form of vengeance on normality, a vaudeville magnification and a caricature of the Japanese male figure.

He was so short that he just missed being a dwarf, so broad that he was almost square. He hardly had any neck and his head, which had no back to it, sat almost straight on his broad shoulders. The hair on his head was thick and of a midnight-blue. It was extremely coarse and harsh in texture and, cut short, stood stark and stiff like the bristles on a boar's back straight up in the air. His arms were exceptionally long and seemed to hang to his knees but his legs by contrast were short, extremely thick and so bowed that the sailors with us called him 'Old Cutlass-legs.' His mouth was filled with big faded yellow teeth, elaborately framed in gold, while his face tended to be square and his forehead rather low and simian. Yet he possessed a pair of extraordinarily fine eyes that seemed to have nothing to do with the rest of his features and appearance. They were exceptionally wide and large for a Japanese and with the light and polish and warm, living, luminous quality of the finest Chinese jade in them. It was extraordinary how far they went to redeem this terrible little man from caricature. One looked into his eyes and all desire to mock vanished, for then one realised that this twisted being was, in some manner beyond European comprehension, a dedicated and utterly selfless person.

It was John Lawrence, who suffered more at Hara's hands than any of us except those whom he killed, who first drew our attention to his eyes. I remember so clearly his words one day after a terrible beating in prison.

'The thing you mustn't forget about Hara,' he had said, 'is that he is not an individual or for that matter even really a man.' He had gone on to say that Hara was the living myth, the expression in human form, the personification of the intense, inner vision which, far down in their unconscious, keeps the Japanese people together and shapes and compels their thinking and behaviour. We should not forget two thousand seven hundred full cycles of his sun-goddess' rule burnt in him. He was sure no one could be more faithful and responsive to all the imperceptible murmurings of Japan's archaic and submerged racial soul than he. Hara was humble enough to accept implicitly the promptings of his national spirit. He was a simple, uneducated country lad with a primitive

integrity unassailed by higher education, and really believed all the myths and legends of the past so deeply that he did not hesitate to kill for them. Only the day before he had told Lawrence how in Manchuria the sun-goddess had once lifted a train full of soldiers over a Chinese undetected mine laid for them on the track and put them all down again safely on the other side.

'But just look in his eyes,' Lawrence had said: 'there is nothing ignoble or insincere there: only an ancient light, refuelled, quickened and brightly burning. There is something about the fellow I rather like and respect.'

This last sentence was such heresy among us at the time that I protested at once. Nothing Lawrence could say or explain could wash our *bête noir blanc* or even *jaune* for that matter, and I would have none of it.

'The troops do not call him "Rottang" for nothing,' I had reminded him severely. 'Rottang' is the Malay for the kind of cane Hara was seldom without. The troops christened him that because he would at times, seemingly without cause, beat them over the head and face with it.

'He can't help himself,' John Lawrence had said. 'It is not he but an act of Japanese gods in him, don't you see? You remember what the moon does to him!'

And indeed I remembered. The attraction, both the keen conscious and the deep, submerged attraction that all the Japanese feel for the moon seemed to come to a point in Hara. If ever there was a moon-swung, moon-haunted, moon-drawn soul it was he. As the moon waxed—and how it waxed in the soft, velvet sky of Insulinda, how it grew and seemed to swell to double its normal gold and mystically burning proportions in that soft, elastic air; how it swung calmly over the great volcanic valleys like a sacred lamp, while the ground mist, mingling with the smell of cloves, cinnamon and all the fragrant spices of Insulinda drifted among the soaring tree trunks like incense round the lacquered columns of a sequined temple—Yes! as this unbelievable moon expanded and spread its gold among the blacknesses of our jungle night, we saw it draw a far tide of mythological frenzy to the full in Hara's blood. Seven days, three days before and three days after and on the day of the full moon itself, were always our days of greatest danger with Hara. Most of his worst beatings and all his killings took place then. But once the beating was over and the moon waning, he would be, for him, extraordinarily generous to us. It



was as if the beating and killing had purged him of impurities of spirit, of madness and evil in some strange way and made him grateful to them. In fact, the morning after he had cut off the head of one of us, I remember seeing him talking to Lawrence and being struck by the fact that he had an expression of purified, of youthful and almost springlike innocence on his face, as if the sacrifice of the life of an innocent British aircraftman the night before, had redeemed him from all original as well as private and personal sin, and appeased for the time the hungry batlike gods of his race.

All this passed through my mind like a dream with the speed and colour of a dream and it was almost like a man half asleep that I heard Lawrence continue: 'Yes. It is curious that you too should think of him just then; for I have an anniversary of Hara in me today, that I am not allowed to forget, try as I may. Have I ever told you?'

He had not and eager to consolidate any contact between us, even this grim, precarious bridge, I said quickly: 'No! Please tell me.'

Well it was exactly seven years ago, he said, seven years within an hour or so, allowing for differences of Insulinda and Greenwich mean time. He was lying in a dream beyond the deep, raw, physical pain in his bruised and outraged body, when far away, like a bird perched on the daylight rim of a deep well into which he might have been thrown, he heard the first chee-chak call. Yes, that was it: a chee-chak, one of those agile, translucent little lizards that lived in every hut, house and even deepest dungeons in Insulinda. There were two of them in his cell and he loved them dearly. They had shared his solitary confinement from the beginning and in his affection for them he fancied he could tell them apart, the male from the female, just by the sound of their voices. They were the only living things not Japanese or Korean, not an active, aggressive enemy that he had seen for many weeks. So real had they become to him that he christened them Patrick and Patricia. He knew instantly when he heard the sound, that the sound came from Patricia, and at once he was out of the dream that had consoled and drugged his pain, and back on the damp stone floor with his bruised, stiff, aching and tired body, so tired that it could hardly take note even of the dismay which clutched at his heart the moment Patricia called. For she called like that only when it was well and truly dark, only when the jungle



outside had closed its ranks and fallen back on its own black shadows between the purple volcanoes, the better to withstand that sheer, utter obliteration of outline and shape brought about by the overwhelming invasion of the moonless tropical night in the valley outside. It was as if then Patricia herself was afraid and wanted Patrick quickly to rejoin and reassure her that this great black nothingness abolished only the vision of the nearness of her mate and not the nearness itself. There ! Patrick had answered her, and Lawrence knew his fear was justified. For this was the hour at which the Japanese usually came for him ; this was the time of night when they usually did their torturing. Yes, the details of it were not important, he said, but for weeks they had been torturing him, and the interesting thing was they did it always at night.

I might smile and think him fanciful as I did about his belief that Hara was an embodiment of a myth more than a conscious individual being, even though I had seen for myself how moon-swung Hara and his countrymen were. But that was by no means all there was to it. That was only the elementary beginning of it all. The more complete truth was : they were all still deeply submerged like animals, insects and plants in the succession of the hours, the movement of day into night and of the days into their lunar months and the months into their seasons. They were subject to cosmic rhythm and movement and ruled by cosmic forces beyond their control to an extent undreamt of in the European mind and philosophy. He would have more to say of that presently, but all he had to stress at the moment was this : it was only at night that people so submerged in the raw elements of nature could discover sufficiently the night within themselves—could go down far enough with sun and sunlight into that deep, deep pit of blackness in time and themselves to the bottom of their own unlit natures, where torture was not only natural but inevitable, like the tides of the sea. I may not recognise it, he said, but Patricia and Patrick knew in the nerves and very swish of their tidal tails that a moment of great and ancient dread in the movement of the spheres had come. And hardly had they called, when he heard the jack-booted steps, untidy and slurred as if the boots were mounted on an ourang-outang and not a man, coming down the corridor towards his cell.

'Our Father which art in heaven,' his lips moved instinctively. 'Once more please be thou my shepherd.'

As he said this prayer for the third time to himself, the door was unlocked and a Korean guard called out, in a mixture of the crudest Japanese and Malay and in the most arrogant and insolent tone : '*Kura!* You there, come here ! *Lakas!* Quick !'

He got up slowly. He could not in his condition do otherwise, but it was too slow for the guard who jumped into the cell, pulled Lawrence angrily to his feet and pushed him out into the corridor, prodding him with the butt of his rifle and saying again and again : '*Lakas! Lakas!*' and '*Quick! Quick!*' as well as making other strange irritated abdominal noises at him. In a few minutes he was marched into the Commandant's office and there sitting at the Commandant's desk was not that girlish young subaltern, but Hara himself with a section of the guard, hat in hand and rifles at the side standing respectfully behind him. Lawrence, his eyes hurting as if stung by bees in that fierce electric light, looked round the room for the rest of the inquisition as he called them, that expert band from the Kempeitai, the headquarters of the secret-police, who did the real torturing, but there was not a sign of any of them.

For the first time a feeling of hope so keen and unnerving that his conscious mind would not allow it, assailed him fiercely. True, Hara was one of the band but not the worst. He joined in too but only when that deep sense of an almost mystical necessity to participate in all that a group or herd of his countrymen did, forced him to identify himself with what was going on. It was as if they all were incapable of experiencing anything individually ; as if a thought or deed in one was instantly contagion to the rest and the fated plague of cruel-doing like a black or yellow death killed their individual resistances in an instant. Hara, after all, was the Japanese of the Japanese among them and he too would have to join in the torturing. But he never started it and Lawrence knew somehow that he would have preferred killing outright to protracted torture. With all this in his mind he looked at Hara more closely and noticed that his eyes were unusually bright and his cheeks flushed.

'He has been drinking,' he thought, for there was no mistaking in Hara's cheeks the tell-tale pink that drink brings so easily to the Japanese face. 'And that accounts for the glitter in his eye. I had better watch out.'

He was right about the flush in Hara's cheeks but wrong about the light in his eye, for suddenly Hara said, with a curl of the

lip that might have been a smile strangled at birth : 'Rōrensu-san : do you know Fāzeru Kurisumasu ?'

The unexpected use of the polite 'san' to his name so nearly unnerved Lawrence that he could hardly concentrate on the mysterious 'Fāzeru Kurisumasu' in Hara's question, until he saw the clouds of incomprehension at his slowness, which usually precluded frenzy, gathering over Hara's impatient brow. Then, he got it.

'Yes, Hara-san,' he said slowly. 'I know of Father Christmas.'

'Heh-to !' Hara exclaimed, hissing with polite gratification between his teeth, a gleam of gold sparkling for a moment between his long lips. Then sitting far back in his chair, he announced : 'Tonight I am Fāzeru Kurisumasu !' Three or four times he made this astonishing statement, roaring with laughter.

Lawrence joined in politely without any idea what it really meant. He had been lying there in his cell alone, under sentence of death, for so long that he hardly knew the hour of the night beyond the fact that it was normal torture hour, and he had no idea of the date or month ; he certainly had no idea that it was Christmas.

Hara enjoyed his announcement and Lawrence's obvious perplexity so much that he would have gone on prolonging his moment of privileged and one-sided merriment, had not a guard presented himself at that moment in the doorway and ushered in a tall, bearded Englishman, in the faded uniform of a Group-Captain in the R.A.F.

Hara stopped laughing instantly and an expression of reserve, almost of hostility came over his features at the sight of Hicksley-Ellis' elongated frame in the doorway.

I could see Hara clearly, as Lawrence spoke ; could see him stiffen at the R.A.F. officer's entrance, for of all of us he hated the tall, lipping Hicksley-Ellis, I think, by far the most.

'This Air-Force Colonel,' he told Lawrence in Japanese, waving his hand disdainfully at the Group-Captain, 'is Commander of the prisoners in my camp ; you can go with him now.'

Lawrence hesitated, not believing his ears, and Hara, confirmed in his own sense of the magnanimity of his gesture by the unwilling expression of disbelief on Lawrence's face, sat back and laughed all the more. Seeing him laugh like that again, Lawrence at last believed him and walked over to join the Group-Captain. Together, without a word, they started to go but as they got to the door, Hara in his fiercest parade voice called : 'Rōrensu !'

Lawrence turned round with a resigned despair. He might have known it, known that this transition was too sudden, too good to be true; this was but part of the torture; some psychologist among the secret police must have put the simple Hara up to it. But one look at Hara's face reassured him. He was still beaming benevolently, a strange twisted smile, between a quick, curling lip and yellow teeth framed in gold on his twilight face. With an immense, hissing effort, as he caught Lawrence's eye, he called out, 'Rōrensu : Merry Kurisumasu !'

'Merry' and 'Fāzeru Kurisumasu' were the only English words Lawrence ever heard him use and he believed Hara knew no others. Hara went pinb r still with the effort of getting them out, before he relaxed, purring almost like a cat, in the Commandant's chair.

'But he knew something about Christmas, all the same,' I interrupted Lawrence. 'It was most extraordinary, you know. When the Padre, Hicksley-Ellis and I, thought of organising some celebration of our first Christmas in gaol, we never thought for a moment a thug like Hara would allow it. But the curious thing was when we asked him, he exclaimed at once, so our interpreter said : "The feast of Fāzeru Kurisumasu !" When the interpreter answered "Yes," Hara agreed at once. No argument or special plea was needed. He said "Yes" firmly, and his orders went out accordingly. In fact, he was himself so taken by the idea that he went to the other camps that were also in his Officer's command, camps with non-Christian Chinese, animistic Menadonese and Moslem Javanese in them and forced them all to celebrate Christmas whether they liked it or not. The interpreter told us, in fact, that Hara even beat up the Chinese commandant. When Hara asked him who Fāzeru Kurisumasu was, the unsuspecting man quite truthfully said he had no idea. Whereupon Hara called him a liar, a crime in his code equal to "wrong thinking" and "wilfulness," said all the world knew who "Fāzeru Kurisumasu" was, and at once flew into one of his frenzies. It was odd, very odd, the value he attached to Christmas; we never found out where he got it from. Did you?'

'I am afraid not,' Lawrence answered, 'but odder still it saved my life.'

'You never told us !' I exclaimed, amazed.

'No, I did not, for I didn't know it myself at the time, though I expected it of course from my own sentence. But I saw my papers

after the war and they were actually going to kill me on December 27. But your putting the idea of Christmas into Hara's head saved me. He substituted a Chinaman for me and let me out as a gesture to "Fāzeru Kurisumasu." But to continue . . .

He had followed Hicksley-Ellis out of Hara's office and joined up with me again in the common prison. Suddenly he smiled at me, a gentle, reminiscent and tenderly grateful smile as the relief of his release came back to him. Did I remember the moment? He could not but be amused in his recollection, for although we were all incarcerated in a Dutch colonial gaol for murderers and desperate criminals, so relative had our concept of freedom become, that we rushed up to him and congratulated him on his liberation without a trace on our part, or a suspicion on his, of the irony implicit in it.

Then not long afterwards Hara suddenly left us. He was put in charge of a draft of R.A.F. officers and men under Hicksley-Ellis, and sent to build aerodromes in the outer islands. We did not see him again until near the end, when he returned with only one-fifth of the original draft left alive. Our men looked like ghosts or drought-stricken cattle when they arrived back. We could see their shoulder-blades and ribs through their thread-bare tunics. They were so weak that we had to carry most of them in stretchers from the cattle-trucks wherein they'd travelled, trucks which stank of urine and diseased excretions. For not only were they so starved that just a faint pulse of life fluttering with a rapidly regressive spirit was left in them, but also they all had either dysentery, malignant malaria or both. One-fifth was all that remained; the rest were dead and Hicksley-Ellis had terrible things to tell of their treatment by the Japanese officers and N.C.O.s and their Korean underlings, and above all about Hara. Again, Hara was at the centre, the primordial Japanese core of this weird inspiration of distorted circumstances. It was he who was again *de facto* if not *de jure* ruler of their world; he who beat dying men saying there was nothing wrong with them except their 'spirit,' their 'evil thinking,' their 'wayward wilfulness of heart' which made them deliberately ill in order to retard the Japanese war effort. It was he, Hara, who cut off the heads of three Aircraftmen because they had crept through a fence at night to buy food in a village, and after each head rolled on the ground brought his sword to his lips thanking it for having done its work so cleanly. It was he who day after day in the tropical sun drove a horde of men



ailing and only half alive to scrape an aerodrome out of coral rock with inadequate tools until they were dying and being thrown to the sharks in the sea at the rate of twenty or thirty a day. But Hara himself appeared untouched by his experience, as if he had foreseen and presuffered it all in his mother's womb, as if life could neither add to nor diminish the stark wine in his legendary cup. He came back to us burnt black by the sun ; that was all. For the rest he naturally took up the steely thread of command where he left it as if he had never been away, and drove us again with the same iron hand.

Even at the end when the prison was full of rumours and the treacherous, unstable Korean guards, scenting a change in the wind of time, were beginning to fawn and make-up to our men for past misdeeds, were even whining to them about their own suppression under the Japanese, when the ground under the feet of Hara's war lords was cracking and reverberating from the shock of the explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and when the legendary twilight of the submerged racial soul of Japan must have been dark and sagging under the weight of the wings of dragons coming home to roost, Hara never trembled nor wavered once. He must have known as well as anybody what was going on, but in that tide of rumour and wild emotion running free before the wind of change, he stood like a rock.

Only three days before the end there was a terrible scene with Lawrence. Lawrence had found a Korean sentry, one of the worst, prodding a dying man with his bayonet, trying to make the Aircraftman stand up to salute him. Lawrence had seized the sentry's rifle with both hands, pushed the bayonet aside and forced himself between the sentry and the sick man. He was immediately marched off to the guard-room, arriving there just as Hara returned from a tour of inspection. The sentry told Hara what had happened and Hara, much as he liked Lawrence, would not overlook this insult to the arms of his country. He beat-up Lawrence with his cane over the face and head so thoroughly that I hardly recognised him when he joined us again.

Three days later the end came and we all went our inevitable ways. Lawrence did not see Hara again for nearly two years. When he saw Hara then it was in dock at his trial. Yes ! Hadn't I heard? Hara was sought out and brought to trial before one of our War Crimes Tribunals. It was largely Hicksley-Ellis' doing of course. I could have no idea how bitter that mild, lisping,



sensitive fellow had become. It was understandable, of course, after what he had suffered, that he should be truly, implacably and irretrievably bitter and vengeful, and he gave his evidence at the trial with such a malign relish and fury that Hara never had a hope of a mitigated sentence, let alone acquittal. But what was not so understandable was the bitterness of the official prosecution, for bitter as Hicksley-Ellis was, his temper was more than matched by that of the war-crimes sleuths.

'And that,' Lawrence exclaimed, incomprehension on his broad brow : 'was very odd to me. After all, none of them had suffered under the Japanese. As far as I know, not one of the particular bunch on Hara's trail had even been on active service but they were none-the-less a bloodthirsty lot. They were more vengeful on behalf of our injuries than I myself could ever be.'

He said all this in such a way that I gathered he had tried to plead for Hara and had failed. It certainly seemed highly significant to me that, when Lawrence held his hand out after the trial to say good-bye, Hicksley-Ellis had refused to take it and silently turned a neat, tense Air-Force back on him. I could not resist asking therefore :

'Did you tell the Court that Hara saved your life?'

'Indeed I did,' he replied, surprised that I should have found the question necessary. 'I did that and the judge-advocate looked me up and down over a pair of the most unmilitary glasses and said in a slow, precise voice, each syllable as distinct and pointed as a letter pen-pricked on a blank sheet of paper, a trace of ponderous irony, for which I can't blame him, in his voice : "That, of course, Colonel Lawrence, is a valuable consideration—most valuable, indeed hardly less valuable to this court than it must be to you ; but it must not be overlooked that there are many others for whom life would have been no less valuable who are not here today as a direct result of the accused's actions."'

No, there was obviously nothing to be done. Hara was inevitably condemned to be hanged.

'How did he take it?' I asked with the memory of the way others had marched to the fall of Hara's keen two-headed sword on the backs of their necks as fresh in my mind as if it were a picture painted that morning.

'Without a tremor or change of expression, as you would have expected,' Lawrence said. 'After all, he had pleaded guilty from the start, said, as that hopelessly inadequate interpreter told the Court :

"I am wrong for my people and ready to die!" He made no effort to defend himself except to say that he tried never to do more nor less than his duty. He called no witnesses, asked no questions even of me, and just went on standing silently and rigidly to attention in the box right to the end. Besides, all that too had been foreseen.'

'Foreseen?' I asked, surprised.

Yes! He explained Hara had never expected anything except death of some kind in the war. In fact, in an unconscious way, perhaps he had even longed for death. I must please not be too sceptical but try and follow what he was trying to say with intuition rather than with conscious understanding. This was the other half of what he'd been trying to say in the beginning. It was most important, most relevant and the one foundation whereon his understanding either stood erect or fell. . . . He had always felt even when he was in Japan that the Japanese were a people in a profound, inverse, reverse, or if I preferred it, even perverse sense, more in love with death than living. As a nation they romanticised death and self-destruction as no other people. The romantic fulfilment of the national ideal, of the heroic thug of tradition, was often a noble and stylised self-destruction in a selfless cause. It was as if the individual at the start, at birth even, rejected the claims of his own individuality. Henceforth he was inspired not by individual human precept and example so much as by his inborn sense of the behaviour of the corpuscles in his own blood dying every split second in millions in defence of the corporate whole. As a result they were socially not unlike a more complex extension of the great insect societies in life. In fact in the days when he lived in Japan, much as he liked the people and country, his mind always returned involuntarily to this basic comparison: the just parallel was not an animal one, was not even the most tight and fanatical horde, but an insect one: collectively they were a sort of super-society of bees with the Emperor as a male queen-bee at the centre. He did not want to exaggerate these things but he knew of no other way of making me realise how strangely, almost cosmically propelled, like an eccentric and dying comet on an archaic, anti-clockwise and foredoomed course, Hara's people had been. They were so committed, blindly and mindlessly entangled in their real and imagined past that their view of life was not synchronised to our urgent time. Above all they could not respond to the desperate twentieth-century call for

greater and more precise individual differentiation. Their view of life refused to be individual and to rise above their own volcanic and quaking earth, as if there was always a dark glass or the shadow of the great dragon's wings of their submerged selves between them and the light of individual mind, a long blackness of their own spinning globe between them and the sun, darkening the moon for which they yearned so eagerly, and some of the finest stars. He was sorry if it sounded fantastic but he could put it no other way. Unless . . .

He paused and looked at the simple spire of the village church just appearing in a dip in the fold of the fields in front of us, as if its precise and purposeful shape presiding so confidently over the trusting and sleeping land, rebuked the shapeless, unformed and dim-lit region wherein his imagination moved so like a lone sleep-walker at midnight. Thereupon, he broke off the apparent continuity of his thought at once and asked me if I knew how the Japanese calculated the age of an individual? I said 'No' and he explained that at birth they added nine months to a person's life, counted in all the days between his conception and emergence from the womb. Didn't I see the significance of that? Didn't I realise that such a system of reckoning life was not just an artless and naïve accident of minds more primitive than ours? If I paused to reflect how biology clearly establishes that we recapture and relive in the womb the whole evolution of life from *amoeba* to *pithecanthropus erectus*, surely I too would recognise implicit in this system of reckoning a clear, instinctive acknowledgement of the importance of the dim past to the Japanese character. He certainly looked at it that way and until now he had been forced to think of them as a people whose spiritual and mental umbilical cord with the past was uncut; as a people still tied by the navel to the mythical mother and begetter of their race, the great sun-goddess *Ama-terasu*. Even in that they were characteristically perverse, reverse and inside out, for to most races in the past the sun was a bright and shining masculine deity, but to them only a great, darkly glittering mother. While the moon, so beloved and eternally feminine to the rest of mankind, was male and masculine to them. Perhaps it was that inside-out, upside-down subjection to the past which gave them their love of death.

If I had ever attended a feast of the dead in Japan as he had often done I would not be surprised at his use of so strange a word as love to illustrate his meaning. That feast was the gayest and

most cheerful of all Japanese celebrations. Their dead were happy, cheerful, contented and benevolent spirits. Why? Because the living, one felt, really preferred dying to living as they had to live; not only preferred it but also thought it nobler to die than to live for their country. Not life but death was romantic to them and Hara was no exception. He had all this and more, deeply ingrained in him, underneath and beyond conscious thinking; he had more because above all he was a humble, simple and believing country fellow as well.

'I shall never forget one night in prison,' Lawrence continued, picking up yet another thread of our prison yesterdays, and weaving it as if it were something new and freshly made into this pattern of Hara in his mind until my heart was heavy that so much should remain for him apparently immune to time. 'Hara sent for me. He had been drinking and greeted me uproariously but I knew his merriment was faked. He always behaved like that when his heart and mind were threatening to join in revolt against his long years of exile from Japan. I could see that the drink had failed to blur the keen edge of nostalgia that was like a knife-stab in the pit of his stomach. He wanted someone to talk to about his country and for some hours I walked Japan from end to end with him through all four of its unique and dramatic seasons. The mask of cheerfulness got more and more thread-bare as the evening wore on and at last Hara tore it from his face.

"Why, Rōrensu," he exclaimed fiercely at last. "Why are you alive? I would like you better if you were dead. How could an officer of your rank ever have allowed himself to fall alive in our hands? How can you bear the disgrace? Why don't you kill yourself?"

'Yes. He asked me that too once,' I interrupted, more with the object of letting Lawrence know how closely I was following him than of telling him something he didn't know. 'In fact he taunted us all so much with it that in time the Koreans picked up the habit too, but what did you say in reply?'

'I admitted the disgrace, if he wished to call it that,' Lawrence replied. 'But said that in our view disgrace, like danger, was something which also had to be bravely borne and lived through, and not run away from by a cowardly taking of one's own life. This was so novel and unexpected a point of view to him that he was tempted to dismiss it as false and made himself say: "No! no! no! it is fear of dying that stops you all." He

spat disdainfully on the floor and then tapping on his chest with great emphasis added : " I am already dead. I, Hara, died many years ago."

' And then it came out, of course. The night before he left home to join the army at the age of seventeen, that is after nine months in the womb and sixteen years and three months on earth, he had gone to a little shrine in the hills nearby to say goodbye to life, to tell the spirits of his ancestors that he was dying that day in his heart and spirit for his country so that when death came to claim him in battle it would be a mere technicality, so that far from being surprised he would greet it either like a bosom friend, long expected and overdue, or merely accept it as formal confirmation of a state which had long existed. To hear him one would have thought that this bow-legged boy, with his blue-shaven head, yellow face and shuffling walk, had gone to report to his ancestors his decision to enter one of the grimmer monastic orders like the Grande Chartreuse, rather than to announce his banal intention of joining a regiment of infantry. But you see what I mean, when I say the end too had been foreseen ? '

I nodded silently, too interested to want to speak, and Lawrence went steadily on. Even that evening in prison Lawrence was conscious of a content, a sort of extra-territorial meaning to the moment that did not properly belong to it. It was as if Hara's end was drinking his wine with him, as if far down at some inexpressible depth in their minds the ultimate sentence was already pronounced. Looking back now, he found it most significant, that towards the end of the evening, Hara began to try his hand at composing verses in that tight, brief and extremely formal convention in which the popular hero of the past in Japan inevitably said farewell to the world before taking his own life. He remembered Hara's final effort well : roughly translated it ran :

' When I was seventeen looking over the pines at Kurashiyama, I saw on the full yellow moon, the shadow of wild-geese flying South. There is no shadow of wild-geese returning on the moon rising over Kurashiyama tonight.'

' Poor devil : as I watched him and listened to him trying to break into verse, suddenly I saw our rôles reversed. I saw as if by a flash of lightning in the darkness of my own mind that I was really the free man and Hara, my gaoler, the prisoner. I had once in my youth in those ample, unexacting days before the war when the coining of an epigram had looked so convincingly like a dis-



covery of wisdom, defined individual freedom to myself as freedom to choose one's own cage in life. Hara had never known even that limited freedom. He was born in a cage, a prisoner in an oubliette of mythology, chained to bars welded by a great blacksmith of the ancient gods themselves. And I felt an immense pity for him. And now four years later, Hara was our kind of prisoner as well and in the dock for the last time, with sentence of death irrevocably pronounced.'

So unsurprised, so unperturbed was Hara, Lawrence said, that as his escort snapped the handcuffs on him and ordered him to step down to his cell below, he stopped on the edge of the concealed stair, turned round with the utmost self-composure, sought out Lawrence and Hicksley-Ellis who were sitting side by side next to the prosecuting officer. When his eyes met theirs, he raised his manacled hands above his head, clasped them together like those of a boxer who had just won the world championship and waved gaily to the two of them, grinning a golden smile from ear to ear as he did so.

How clearly I saw him do it: that gesture was all of a piece with the character also as I knew it, for whatever it was that held Hara together, I too knew that he could never fail it. Suddenly I was glad, almost grateful to him that he had taken it like that, gone from our view with a gay, triumphant gesture of farewell, for somehow, I imagined, that would make it easier for us now to have done with his memory.

'So that was how he went,' I remarked, not without a certain unwilling relief, 'that then was Hara's that.'

'No, not at all,' Lawrence said quickly, a strange new ring in his voice, a passionate and surprisingly emotional undertone for so calm and contemplative a person. 'That by no means was his "that." As far as I am concerned "that" was only the end of the beginning of the "that" . . .'

It came out then that the night before he was hanged, Hara got a message through, begging Lawrence to come and see him. Hara had made the request—his last—many days before but it was not surprising to anyone who knew the 'usual official channels' as well as we did that the request did not reach Lawrence until ten o'clock on the night before the morning set for the execution. Lawrence got his car out as fast as he could; his chivalrous nature outraged by the thought that the condemned man would now most certainly have given up all hope of seeing him, and be preparing



to die with the bitter conviction that even his last slight request had been too much. Hara's prison was on the far side of the island and he could not, with the best of luck, get there before midnight.

The evening was very still and quiet, rather as if it had caught its own breath at the beauty and brilliance of the night that was marching down on it out of the East like a goddess with jewels of fire. An immense full moon had swung itself clear over the dark fringe of the jungle bound, like a ceremonial fringe of ostrich plumes designed for an ancient barbaric ritual, to the dark brow of the land ahead. In that responsive and plastic tropical air the moon seemed magnified to twice its normal size and to be quick-silver wet and dripping with its own light. To the north of the jungle and all along its heavy feathered fringes the sea rolled and unrolled its silver and gold cloak onto the white and sparkling sand, as lightly and deftly as a fine old far-eastern merchant unrolling bales of his choicest silk. The ancient, patient swish of it all was constantly in Lawrence's ears. But far out on the horizon, the sea too went dark, seemed shrunk into a close, defensive ring, in face of the thunder and lightning hurled against it by curled, curved and jagged peaks of cloud which stood revealed on the uttermost edge by the intermittent electric glow imperative in purple and sullen in gold. It was the sort of night and the kind of setting in a half-way moment between the end of one day and the beginning of the other, in which Lawrence's articulate knowledge seemed to hold the same urgent, spasmodic, and intermittent quality as the electricity and lightning quivering along the horizon; yet his inarticulate, inexpressible awareness of the abiding meaning, beauty and richness of life was as great as the vast, eager-footed and passionate night striding overhead like a queen to a meeting with a royal lover. All that we had been through, the war, the torture, the long hunger, all the grim and tranced years in our sordid prison, he found light and insignificant weighed in the golden scales of that moment. The thought that yet another life should be sacrificed to our discredited and insufficient past, seemed particularly pointless and repugnant and filled him with a sense of angry rebellion. In this mood and manner he arrived at the prison just before midnight. He found he was expected and was taken at once to Hara's cell.

Like all condemned persons Hara was alone in the cell. When the door opened to let Lawrence in, although there was a chair at

hand Hara was standing by the window, his face close to the bars, looking at the moonlight, so vivid and intense by contrast to the darkness inside that it was like a sheet of silver silk nailed to the square window. He had obviously given up all idea of visitors and was expecting, at most, only a routine call from one of his gaolers. He made no effort to turn round or speak. But as the guard switched on the light he turned to make a gesture of protest and saw Lawrence. He stiffened as if hit by a heavy blow in the back, came to attention and bowed silently and deeply to his visitor in a manner which told Lawrence that he was moved beyond words. As he bowed Lawrence saw that his head had been freshly shaven and that the new scraped skin shone like satin in the electric light. Lawrence ordered the sentry to leave them for a while, and as the door once more closed he said to Hara who was coming out of his low bow :

'I'm very sorry I am so late. But I only got your message at nine o'clock. I expect you gave me up as a bad job long ago and thought I'd refused to come.'

'No, Rôrensu-san,' Hara answered. 'No, not that. I never thought you would refuse to come, but I was afraid my message, for many reasons might not be delivered to you. I am very grateful to you for coming and I apologise for troubling you. I would not have done so if it hadn't been so important. Forgive me please, but there is something wrong in my thinking and I knew you would understand how hard it would be for me to die with wrong thoughts in my head.'

Hara spoke slowly and deliberately in a polite, even voice, but Lawrence could tell from its very evenness that his thought was flowing in a deep, fast stream out to sea, flowing in a deeper chasm of himself than it had ever flowed before.

'Poor, poor devil, bloody poor devil,' he thought, 'even now the problem is "thinking," always his own or other people's "thinking" at fault.'

'There is nothing to forgive Hara-san,' he said aloud. 'I came at once when I got your message and I came gladly. Please tell me what it is and I'll try and help you.'

From the way Hara's dark, slanted, child-of-a-sun-goddess' eyes lit up at the use of the polite 'san' to his name, Lawrence knew that Hara had not been spoken to in that manner for many months.

'Rôrensu-san,' he answered eagerly, pleading more like a boy with his teacher than a war-scarred sergeant-major with an enemy

and an officer, 'it is only this : you have always, I felt, always understood us Japanese. Even when I have had to punish you, I felt you understood it was not I, Hara, who wanted it, but that it had to be, and you never hated me for it. Please tell me now : you English I have always been told are fair and just people : whatever other faults we all think you have ; we have always looked upon you as a just people. You know I am not afraid to die. You know that after what has happened to my country I shall be glad to die tomorrow. Look, I have shaved the hair off my head, I have taken a bath of purification, rinsed my mouth and throat, washed my hands and drunk the last cupful of water for the long journey. I have emptied the world from my head, washed it off my body, and I am ready for my body to die, as I have died in my mind long since. Truly you must know, I do not mind dying, only, only, only, why must I die for the reason you give? I don't know what I have done wrong that other soldiers who are not to die have not done. We have all killed one another and I know it is not good, but it is war. I have punished you and killed your people, but I punished you no more and killed no more than I would have done if you were Japanese in my charge who had behaved in the same way. I was kinder to you, in fact, than I would have been to my own people, kinder to you all than many others. I was more lenient, believe it or not, than army rules and rulers demanded. If I had not been so severe and strict you would all have collapsed in your spirit and died because your way of thinking was so wrong and your disgrace so great. If it were not for me, Hicksley-Ellis and all his men would have died on the island out of despair. It was not my fault that the ships with food and medicine did not come. I could only beat my prisoners alive and save those that had it in them to live by beating them to greater effort. And now I am being killed for it. I do not understand where I went wrong, except in the general wrong of us all. If I did another wrong please tell me how and why and I shall die happy.'

'I didn't know what to say.' Lawrence turned to me with a gesture of despair. 'He was only asking me what I had asked myself ever since these damned war-trials began. I honestly did not understand myself. I never saw the good of them. It seemed to me just as wrong for us now to condemn Hara under a law which had never been his, of which he had never even heard, as he and his masters had been to punish and kill us for transgressions of the code of Japan that was not ours. It was not as if he had

sinned against his own lights : if ever a person had been true to himself and the twilight glimmer in him, it was this terrible little man. He may have done wrong for the right reasons but how could it be squared by us now doing right in the wrong way. No punishment I could think of could restore the past, could be more futile and more calculated even to give the discredited past a new lease of life in the present than this sort of uncomprehending and uncomprehended vengeance ! I didn't know what the hell to say !'

The distress over his predicament became so poignant in this recollection that he broke off with a wave of his hand at the darkening sky.

'But you did say something surely,' I said. 'You could not leave it at that.'

'Oh yes, I said something,' he said sadly, 'but it was most inadequate. All I could tell him was that I did not understand myself and that if it lay with me I would gladly let him out and send him straight back to his family.'

'And did that satisfy him?' I asked.

Lawrence shook his head. He didn't think so, for after bowing deeply again and thanking Lawrence, he looked up and asked : 'So what am I to do?'

Lawrence could only say. 'You can try to think only with all your heart, Hara-san, that unfair and unjust as this thing which my people are doing seems to you, that it is done only to try and stop the kind of things that happened between us in the war from ever happening again. You can say to yourself as I used to say to my despairing men in prison under you : "There is a way of winning by losing, a way of victory in defeat which we are going to discover." Perhaps that too must be your way to understanding and victory now.'

'That, Rōrensu-san,' he said, with the quick intake of breath of a Japanese when truly moved : 'is a very Japanese thought !'

They stood in silence for a long while looking each other straight in the eyes, the English officer and the Japanese N.C.O. The moonlight outside was tense, its silver strands trembling faintly with the reverberation of inaudible and far-off thunder and the crackle of the electricity of lightning along the invisible horizon.

Hara was the first to speak. In that unpredictable way of his, he suddenly smiled and said irrelevantly : 'I gave you a good Kurisumasu once, didn't I?'

'Indeed you did,' Lawrence answered unhappily, adding instinc-

tively, 'You gave me a very, very, good Christmas. Please take that thought with you tonight!'

'Can I take it with me all the way?' Hara asked, still smiling but with something almost gaily provocative in his voice. 'Is it good enough to go even where I am going?'

'Yes: much as circumstances seem to belie it,' Lawrence answered, 'it is good enough to take all the way and beyond . . .'

At that moment the guard announced himself and told Lawrence he had already overstayed his time.

'Sayonara Hara-san!' Lawrence said, bowing deeply, using that ancient farewell of the Japanese 'If-so-it-must-be' which is so filled with the sense of their incalculable and inexorable fate. 'Sayonara and God go with you.'

'If so it must be!' Hara said calmly, bowing as deeply. 'If so it must be, and thank you for your great kindness and your good coming, and above all your honourable words.'

Lawrence stood up quickly not trusting his self-control enough to look at Hara again, and started to go, but as he came to the doorway, Hara called out: 'Rōrensu!' just as he had once called it in the Commandant's office after Lawrence's weeks of torture. Lawrence turned and there was Hara grinning widely, faded yellow teeth and gold rims plainly showing as if he had never enjoyed himself more. As Lawrence's eyes met his, he called out gaily: 'Merry Kurisumasu, Rōrensu-san.'

But the eyes, Lawrence said, were not laughing. There was a light in them of a moment which transcends lesser moments wherein all earthly and spiritual conflicts tend to be resolved and unimportant, all partiality and incompleteness gone, and only a deep sombre between-night-and-morning glow left. It transformed Hara's strange, distorted features. The rather anthropoidal, prehistoric face of Hara's looked more beautiful than any Lawrence had ever seen. He was so moved by it and by the expression in those archaic eyes that he wanted to turn back into the cell. Indeed he tried to go back but something would not let him. Half of himself, a deep, instinctive, natural, impulsive half, wanted to go back, clasp Hara in his arms, kiss him goodbye on the forehead and say: 'We may not be able to stop and undo the hard old wrongs of the great world outside, but through you and me no evil shall come either in the unknown where you are going, or in this imperfect and haunted dimension of awareness through which I move. Thus between us, we shall cancel out all private and



personal evil, thus arrest private and personal consequences to blind action and reaction, thus prevent specifically the general incomprehension and misunderstanding, hatred and revenge of our time from spreading further.' But the words would not be uttered and half of him, the conscious half of the officer at the door with a critical, alert sentry at his side held him powerless on the threshold. So for the last time the door shut on Hara and his golden grin.

But all the way back to town that last expression on Hara's face travelled at Lawrence's side. He was filled with regret that he had not gone back. What was this ignoble half that had stopped him? If only he had gone back he felt now he might have changed the whole course of history. For was not that how great things began in the tiny seed of the small change in the troubled individual heart? One single, lonely, inexperienced heart had to change first and all the rest would follow? One true change in one humble, obedient and contrite individual heart humble enough to accept without intellectual question the first faint stirring of the natural spirit seeking flesh and blood to express it, humble enough to live the new meaning before thinking it, and all the rest would have followed as day the night, and one more archaic cycle of hurt, hurt avenged and vengeance revenged would have been cut for ever. He felt he had failed the future and his heart went so dim and black on him that abruptly he pulled up the car by a palm-grove on the edge of the sea.

Sadly he listened to the ancient sound of the water lapping at the sands, and the rustle of the wind of morning in the palms overhead travelling the spring world and night sky like the endless questing spirit of God tracking its brief and imperfect container in man. He saw some junks go out to sea and the full moon come sinking down, fulfilled and weary, on to their black corrugated sails. The moon was now even larger than when he had first seen it. Yes. Now Hara's last moon was not only full but also overflowing with a yellow, valedictory light. And as he was thinking, from a Malay village hidden in the jungle behind there suddenly rang out the crow of a cock, sounding the alarm of day. The sound was more than he could bear. It sounded like notice of the first betrayal joined to depravity of the latest and became a parody of Hara's call of 'Merry Christmas.' And although it was not Christmas and the land behind was not a Christian land, he felt that he had betrayed the sum of all the Christmases.



LAURENS VAN DER POST

Quickly he turned the car round. He would get back to the gaol, see Hara and atone for his hesitation. He drove recklessly fast and reached the gates as the dawn, in a great uprush of passionate flaming red light, hurled itself at the prison towers above him.

'But of course I was too late,' Lawrence told me, terribly distressed. 'Hara was already hanged.'

I took his arm and turned with him for home. I could not speak and when he went on to ask, more of himself than of me or the darkening sky, 'Must we always be too late?' he asked the question, without knowing it, also for me. It hung like the shadow of a bar of a new prison between us and the emerging stars and my heart filled with tears.

## *A Note on Marryat*

BY OLIVER WARNER

---

**D**URING the sixties of the last century a man, curious concerning the ways of his fellows, published a sketch he had written twenty years before. It concerned Captain Marryat.

Whoever he was, this anonymous contributor to the *Cornhill*, he had known Marryat well. Moreover, he had done what few ventured upon, once the seaman-novelist had retired from the world. He had gone to visit him at Langham. There Marryat lived, in a cottage in the Elizabethan style, built after the model of one at Virginia Water belonging to George the Fourth, with latticed windows opening out on to flights of stone steps.

In the forties, such a visit had needed enterprise and purpose. Langham was near Holt, in Norfolk. It was before the railway had approached those parts, and, once he had reached Holt, the traveller drove the remaining few miles in a rumbling fly. On arriving, nobody could be quite certain of his welcome. By nature boundlessly hospitable, Marryat was odd in temper, and he might be living the strangest life. Where, for instance, was his wife?

That question unanswered—and surely not directly asked—the purpose of the visit remained. It was to find out why Marryat lived where he did, miles from anywhere, surrounded by animals: Ben Brace the bull, Zinny the King Charles spaniel, Juno the Italian greyhound, Dumpling the Hanoverian cream pony, and birds galore. There was a young family too; ‘good, truthful children,’ Marryat called them, ‘though they are rather wild.’ And there were some hundreds of acres of unprofitable land.

Marryat explained readily enough why he was at Langham. He liked to watch the quick-set hedges! The visitor laughed. Yes, it was true. ‘A Robinson Crusoe sort of life,’ he added, and the comparison was not inept. Years before, he had exchanged a house near London for the property he now lived on, over a bottle of champagne. The farming lost him money, but he enjoyed it.

There would have been nothing strange in all this, except for the fact that Marryat was still a celebrity, and a man who, in the days



*F. Marryat*

*By permission of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich*

CAPTAIN F. MARRYAT, R.N.

*From a drawing by Count d'Orsay*



*By permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum*

NAPOLEON I ON HIS DEATH-BED

*By Captain Frederick Marryat, R.N.*

his visitor best remembered, had been very much of the world. He had been on terms with Bulwer Lytton, Ainsworth, Dickens (*Charley* Dickens, he called him with affection), Lady Blessington, many of the notables of his time. He had been gentleman-in-waiting to the Duke of Sussex, the most literary of the Royal Family. In London, he had at times lived *en prince*. He had had two fortunes through his hands. His father had been Chairman of Lloyds and a potentate in the West Indies who left £250,000. A lawyer uncle had been worth almost as much. Marryat inherited liberal sums from both. His books sold well, and he was still writing. Was it really the quick-set hedges?

It is unlikely we shall ever know for certain. In some ways, Marryat was reticent. He told his guest he never wanted a memoir written about himself, which was a pity, for he had an enthralling life. But time had a trick in store. Florence, one of his little girls, who in the course of the future had varied adventures and wrote many popular books, did in fact publish a life in two short volumes. This was in 1872, five years after the CORNHILL paper. It leaves all the questions unanswered. It is formless, inaccurate, hasty. It was issued nearly a quarter of a century after most of the material on which it should have been based had been scattered. What interest it has, derives from the fact that Marryat himself had the quality of zest, and seemed able to impart it to everything around him. He could be careless, quarrelsome, reckless, wrong-headed, but he was rarely dull—either on paper or in life. He whirled through the world with incessant speed, and left behind him clever children, an unmanageable property, and between two and three million words in print. Towards the end of his career he wrote stories for or about the young. He called them his second harvest, and it is they, and only they, by which he is now remembered. *The Children of the New Forest*, *Masterman Ready*, *Mr. Midshipman Easy*; it is an ill-equipped schoolroom which does not have a battered copy of at least one of this trio lying somewhere around.

## II

Although Marryat, who was born in 1792, did not go to sea until the year after Trafalgar, he was lucky in his first appointment, for it was to Lord Cockrane's crack frigate the *Imperieuse*. No spirited boy, joining the navy at a time when maritime decision had already been gained, could have asked for better. Marryat had run away

from school so often that in the end his father was only too glad to make use of his position at Lloyd's to get his son a promising ship. What he really ran away from was not so much lessons—he was no fool—as his elder brother's cast off clothing, or so he said. At any rate, go he did, and for a matter of nine years his life was stuffed with adventure: not fleet actions, but cuttings-out, boat-work, blowing up forts, bombardments, taking prizes, all the spice of combat in small ships. After one episode he was left for dead. 'Here's one young cock that won't crow any more!' said a ship-mate, brutally enough. 'You're a liar,' said the prostrate Marryat, and from that moment began to recover.

Marryat's best years at sea were his first. He recorded them himself in the pages of John Marshall's *Royal Naval Biography*, as a letter to William O'Byrne, who edited a later work of the same sort, makes clear by implication. The terms which he used of himself were not unflattering. He was, in fact, more than a hundred times in conflict with the enemy, at a period when numbers of his contemporaries had never seen a gun loaded in action. He had been wounded. He had rescued men from drowning more than once. He was a lieutenant by the time he was twenty, but after the peace of 1815, when he was a very junior commander, opportunities for further distinction grew rare. He was captain of a ship off St. Helena at the time of Napoleon's death, and, as he had some skill as a draughtsman, was requested to draw the Emperor's head as he lay before burial. Versions of this drawing were the basis of popular prints.

Marryat had to wait until 1828 before he reached post-rank. He was given Companionship of the Bath and an augmentation of arms for services while in command of H.M.S. *Larne* in the East Indies. On that station he was for some time senior naval officer in a difficult and little remembered campaign in Burma. His last sea appointment, command of H.M.S. *Ariadne*, ended when he had been twenty-four years on the active list. Although he sought employment later, if whim or circumstances prompted him, he never again trod the deck of a man of war except as a guest.

When Marryat left the sea he had a store of vivid memories, not all of them happy. The navy of the Georgian era produced its heroes, but few survived its hardships unscathed in mind and body. Besides Cockrane and his miniature victories, there were less good episodes in his stretch of service; for instance, the well conceived but ill supported action at the Basque Roads in 1809, where the



pious Lord Gambier missed a golden chance to annihilate an enemy fleet; the dismal ineptitude of the amphibious expedition to Walcheren; the monotony and unpopularity of watching for smugglers in the Channel. Marryat had indeed seen much of the world, good and bad, and when he settled ashore he had already discovered he could record what he knew.

He had educated himself. In one of his earlier novels, *Newton Forster*, he says that, of his six years' service as midshipman, he reckoned 'two of them were passed away perched upon the cross-trees, looking down with calm philosophy upon the microcosm below.' This mast-heading was a normal punishment, which Marryat turned to profit by reading. There is a crude water-colour, now in the British Museum, which shows him as he underwent this swaying discipline. He saw life, then and later, like a series of slides in a magic lantern. It was a simile of which he was fond.

Once published, Marryat's fame came quickly, and stayed. 'I should like very much to have engraved on my coffin,' he wrote in *The King's Own*, "'Many years Commissioner," or "Lord of the Admiralty," or "Governor of Greenwich Hospital," "Ambassador," "Privy Councillor" or, in fact, anything but "Captain"; for, though acknowledged to be a good travelling name, it is a very insignificant title at the end of our journey.' He had his wish. It was as a novelist that he was widely known. Yet even for this fact, he was heard to express some scorn; like Congreve before him, he did not perceive how much rarer was a born writer than a born gentleman. But, even in respect of his fame, time has played Marryat another trick, for his adult novels are unsought.

## III

Marryat began his author's career in a way to be envied. He invented a code of marine signals. It was one of his most lucrative ventures. Started at the instigation of his father, for the use of ships of the merchant navy, later editions carried a list of Lloyd's agents, and were soon in demand all over the world. They brought him a steady income for many years. According to his daughter he sold the copyright 'about 1841,' stipulating that if he revised or added to the signals, as in fact he did, he should have a quarter share of the profit on copies during his lifetime. 'The year following this arrangement,' says Florence, he and his publisher 'jointly cleared between £500 and £600.'

A pamphlet on the impressment of seamen next followed. Impressment was a matter about which Marryat felt keenly, as appears from many incidents in his novels. His ideas were sensible enough, and after a number of them had been officially adopted, he withdrew his little work from circulation. His true start came with a novel, *The Naval Officer*, which was published in three volumes in 1829 and brought him £400. It is a raw, ill-tempered, weakly constructed book, one of the worst he ever wrote. He himself said: 'In *The Naval Officer* much good material was thrown away, but we intend to write it over again some day, and it will be so improved that it may be permitted to stand on the same shelf with *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*.'

Marryat never did write it over again. Instead, he invented variations on the naval theme, each an improvement on the last, and each, at any rate after his longest and fullest work, *Peter Simple*, taking a rosier view of a Service which, were we to judge from the earlier stories, consisted of gory actions, which are yet almost humane by comparison with the brutal floggings which seamen endured over so many generations.

In an appreciation of his work in general, written thirty years ago, Mr. Michael Sadleir said that Marryat is 'the only writer in the tradition of Fielding and Smollett who can claim consideration on the same plane with those famous authors.' This may appear to be high praise for a novelist who is no longer studied in places where they assess English literature; but as one of the few who have read Marryat whole, Mr. Sadleir spoke with authority. Those who have since launched themselves into the vast Marryat fiction voyage may well be inclined to agree with his verdict. The range of the novels extends over land as well as sea. His characters are, in general, full of life. If his denouements are forced, and if he never rises to the height of a great emotion, he builds up a long and superbly detailed panorama of life as it was lived by rich and poor round and about the reign of William the Fourth. Going back in time, no one could hope to understand the day to day shipboard atmosphere of Nelson's navy without a close study of his seafaring books. Even Mr. C. S. Forester's Captain Hornblower owes a debt to him. There is, in fact, a 'Hornblow' in the Marryat series.

Thackeray's favourite Marryat was *Jacob Faithful*, the story of a Thames waterman. Mr. Sadleir likes *Japhet in Search of a Father*. The public at large have chosen *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, and at least

one current reader would vote for *Poor Jack* with its scenes in Greenwich Hospital and its rendering of the life of an old-time Channel pilot. In this book are some of Marryat's fullest studies of women ; not the pleasing looking but cardboard heiresses with whom he was wont to embellish his endings, but flesh and blood creatures, full of faults, and with the courage to surmount the worst of them. Clarkson Stanfield, the marine painter, made a series of drawings for this book. They surrounded the walls of Marryat's study in his later years. Among the best, that of Fisher's Alley, Greenwich, is now, most fittingly, at the National Maritime Museum.

Where Marryat is not concerned with straightforward adventure, piracy, naval warfare, or (as in the case of *The Phantom Ship*) in the resurrection of the legend of the Flying Dutchman, he is often concerned with the father-son relationship. His love scenes draw no blush to the cheek ; what he understands best—and it is curious when his own monetary affairs were long so disordered—is not merely the relationship itself, but the £. s. d. of patrimony. For instance, the plot of *Peter Simple* hinges upon succession to a peerage, with the appropriate income. Jacob Faithful sees his mother blow up from drinking too much gin, taking his father with her. He sells the parental remains for scientific study—for cash—though the true theme concerns his re-establishment as a family man. Japhet searches for a father throughout three volumes, and finds him in the end to be a gold-encrusted nabob. In *Joseph Rushbrook* a son is prepared to sacrifice his life rather than to embarrass a parent who has, with wild improbability, inherited a vast landed estate ; while in *Percival Keene*, perhaps Marryat's most adult novel, the whole course of the story is designed to force an aristocratic father to recognise, through the lad's sheer merit, the honour of having begotten an illegitimate son.

If there is some mystery about this recurrent interest, there are few clues lying ready to the hand of the investigator. Although Marryat was not himself an eldest son, he benefited greatly both from and through his father. No doubt he would himself have said that he could think of nothing better to help out a plot, and that anyway, although the critics always carped, the public liked his books. They did, for years and years. It was many decades after his popularity had waned that men and women began to concern themselves with answers to such questions as a possible Marryat father complex. He would have refused to believe that he had one.

## IV

Marryat loved children. He conjured, played tricks, sparkled with them. If ever Dickens gave a London party, Marryat was first in request, to ensure that it went with a swing. He knew how to tell stories the young could enjoy. 'This today is undisputed,' said Mr. Sadleir: 'but that he is equally a novelist for the critical, sorely needs reaffirmation. His juvenile public has been more faithful to him than that of maturer years, and one can only hope that time will restore him to the affection of the adult.' Time has not yet done so, and it seems questionable, with the press of new fiction each year to distract attention from older favourites, whether it ever will. Perhaps Marryat is destined to become a minor, almost secret cult. If anything in the world could have surprised him, it would have been such a fate as that.

At least the juveniles present no problem. Setting aside *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, which is for old and young alike, there are five. The successes are renowned: to these—*Masterman Ready*, and *The Children of the New Forest*, must be added *The Settlers in Canada*. There is one failure, *The Mission*, and a final story which Marryat did not live to complete, *The Little Savage*. This, though technically a juvenile, has a fierce theme. Its child hero is left alone on a Peruvian guano island with an elderly seaman who has killed his father and starved his mother to death. Before many chapters are over the seaman is blinded and in the child's power. From that time onward 'the little savage' is increasingly master of his own destiny. It is a curiosity of literature, well worth investigating, though not perhaps by the youngest readers. It was finished after Marryat's death by his surviving son Frank.

Frank, incidentally, was by far the most promising of Marryat's children. Frederick, the eldest boy, was lost in H.M.S. *Avenger* when she struck a reef in the Mediterranean in 1847. The shock helped to kill Marryat, and the wreck inspired a little-known but dramatic picture by Stanfield, now in the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester. For a time Frank was also in the navy, and, following a protracted voyage on a surveying ship, he produced a book on Borneo which is of great beauty, and which is illustrated in a way which shows him to have been an artist above the quality of his father. Frank Marryat's other book, *Mountains and Molehills*, an account of the early days of gold discovery in California, pub-

lished in 1855, the year of his early death in London, should always command its place in the literature of pioneer America. Once again, its illustration is brilliant.

## V

Unmysterious as are his books, Marryat's life is full of mists and gaps. While Admiralty records make it simple to plot his whereabouts afloat, once ashore it is another matter. He flitted. He was as restless as Conrad, who carried forward the sea tradition in English fiction to such different purpose. His restlessness arose partly from his life afloat, partly from insatiable curiosity; while his long excursions to the Continent may have been due to debt.

For years, his literary output was prodigious. At one time he owned and edited the *Metropolitan Magazine*, left almost derelict by Thomas ('Ye Mariners of England') Campbell, but resuscitated by Marryat. In this appeared, in serial form, some of his best novels. He married, when twenty-seven, Catherine, daughter of Sir Stephen Shairp of Houston, Linlithgow. Shairp had had a distinguished career as a diplomat in Russia. The Marryats were an ill assorted pair, and of the lady we know little, except that she had eleven children. Forster, Dickens's biographer, records that she was straightlaced, and took little interest in her own family. Florence, indeed, scarcely refers to her mother in her life of her father. After 1837, the year in which the novelist toured Canada, it is doubtful if the Marryats lived together for any length of time.

Marryat died quite young, in 1848, at his chosen Langham. It was years before he was forgotten by his large and faithful public. His novels decorated railway bookstalls throughout the Victorian era. They were among the most reprinted yellow backs. His family scattered. Augusta and Emilia wrote books as well as Frank and Florence. But it was not long before all that was most personal about Marryat had been forgotten, and that he lived only through his work.

As he lay dying, he dictated to one of his daughters. 'Tis a lovely day,' he said. 'Augusta has just brought me three pinks and three roses, and the bouquet is charming. I have opened the windows, and the air is delightful. It is now exactly nine o'clock in the morning, and I am lying on a bed in a place—two miles from the sea, on the coast of Norfolk. As those who read this will probably have heard how strangely life has been preserved in me

#### A NOTE ON MARRYAT

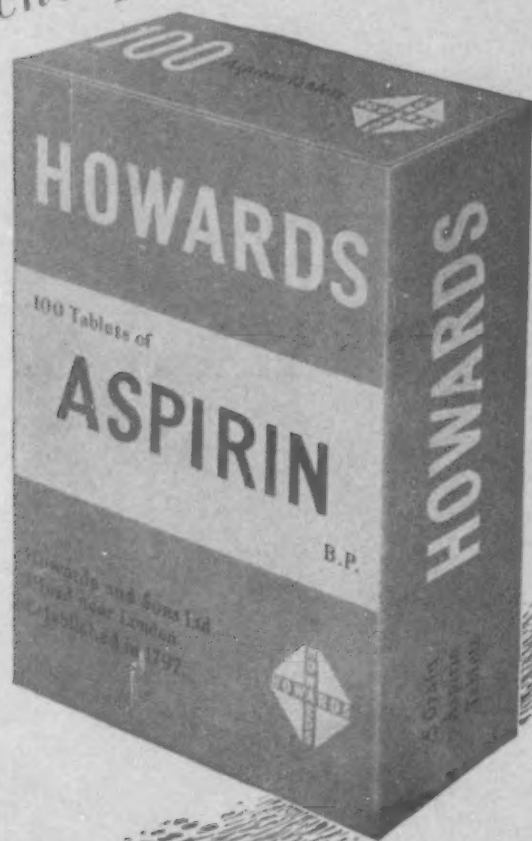
for many days, I shall ask myself, before them, how I feel. To use the common sense of the word, I am happy. I have no sensation of hunger whatever, or of thirst ; my taste is not impaired ; my intellect, notwithstanding the narcotics, is this morning, I think, very pure ; but the great question is " How do I feel, if I may use the term, as an isolated Christian, towards God ? " I feel I love him, and, were my reasoning powers greater, could love him more . . . It is now half-past nine o'clock. World, adieu.'

'Adieu,' he said, not farewell. Perhaps he was right. 'The dead,' says Conrad, 'can only live with the exact intensity and quality of the life imparted to them by the living.' Marryat has, in fact, never died. He is alive in the minds of the young : and the reason is, as Conrad says elsewhere, that 'he is the enslaver of youth, not by the literary artifices of presentation, but by the natural glamour of his own temperament. It is absolutely amazing to us, as the disclosure of the spirit animating the stirring times when the nineteenth century was young. There is an air of fable about it. Its loss would be irreparable, like the curtailment of national story, or the loss of an historical document.'





Not the cheapest . . . but the Best



*'An epic of discovery, a Kon Tiki of the heart'*

## VENTURE TO THE INTERIOR

by  
Laurens van der Post

*'One of the noblest books of travel written in our time, and one destined, I imagine, to have a permanent place in English literature.'*—HOWARD SPRING.

*'A masterpiece. Though I deplore the facile use of the superlative, I am driven to use it in assessing *Venture to the Interior*.'*—GUY RAMSEY.

*'No other book that I have read gives me so vivid an impression of the vastness, variety and magnificence of the African landscape.'*—PETER QUENNELL.

*'Of such abiding beauty, so movingly and so nobly told, that set alone against both fact and fiction of almost any age, it must still be counted as a masterpiece.'*—ADRIAN SELIGMAN.

*Book Society & Evening Standard Choice*

12s. 6d.

THE HOGARTH PRESS